

Ancient Self-Refutation

A 'self-refutation argument' is any argument which aims to show that (and how) a certain thesis is self-refuting. This is the first monograph-length treatment of ancient self-refutation and provides a unified account of what is distinctive in the ancient approach to the self-refutation argument, on the basis of close philological, logical and historical analysis of a variety of sources. It examines the logic, force and prospects of this original style of argumentation within the context of ancient philosophical debates, dispelling various misconceptions concerning its nature and purpose and elucidating some important differences which exist both within the ancient approach to self-refutation and between that approach, as a whole, and some of its modern counterparts. In providing a comprehensive account of ancient self-refutation, the book advances our understanding of influential and debated texts and arguments from philosophers such as Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, the Stoics, the Academic sceptics, the Pyrrhonists and Augustine.

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Ancient Self-Refutation

The Logic and History of the
Self-Refutation Argument
from Democritus to Augustine

LUCA CASTAGNOLI

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Argument from Democritus to Augustine*

LUCA CASTAGNOLI

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107470637

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First published 2010

First paperback edition 2015

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Castagnoli, Luca, 1975–

Ancient self-refutation : the logic and history of the self-refutation argument from Democritus to Augustine / Luca Castagnoli.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-89631-3 (hardback)

1. Refutation (Logic) 2. Reasoning. I. Title.

B491.R44C37 2010

160 – dc22 2010018346

ISBN 978-0-521-89631-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-47063-7 Paperback

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For Valentina

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Acknowledgements

First of all, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Nick Denyer for the skill, flair and generosity with which he supervised my Cambridge doctoral research on ancient self-refutation from October 2001 to December 2004: without his original input I would have probably ended up writing a very different book, and certainly a much worse one for that.

Warm thanks also go to Myles Burnyeat and David Sedley for their invaluable comments and suggestions and for the unwavering support manifested on a number of occasions in the last ten years. From Myles's work I have learnt more on ancient self-refutation than I could ever hope to demonstrate in this book.

I am also delighted to be able to thank here Walter Cavini and Tony Long, by whom I had the luck of being jointly supervised in 1998/9 for my undergraduate 'Tesi di Laurea' *Parentesi pirroniane*; without this preliminary work I could hardly have conceived (or dared to undertake) the much broader project of which this book is the ultimate product. But to Walter I owe infinitely more than this: he introduced me to the wonders of ancient philosophical thought during my four years as an undergraduate philosophy student in Bologna, and was the first to teach me what doing research in this field should mean.

In the last few years I have incurred several other debts of gratitude towards many who, in various ways, have contributed with their input to my research. In particular I wish to thank Fabio Acerbi, Jacques Brunschwig, Alan Code, Lorenzo Corti, Valentina Di Lascio, Paolo Fait, Jakob Fink, Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, Geoffrey Lloyd, Alex Long, Diego Machuca, Mark McPherran, Brian Morton, Simonetta Nannini, Mauro Nasti De Vincentis, Emidio Spinelli, Katja Vogt, Robert Wardy, Mark Wildish and two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press.

I have also had the pleasure to present several parts of this book (at various stages of their preparation) to a number of responsive audiences in

Rome, Cambridge, Bologna, Padua, Durham, Copenhagen, Berkeley and St Andrews; I am glad to be able to thank these audiences here.

Needless to say, none of the colleagues and friends I have mentioned ought to be considered responsible for any remaining errors this book may contain.

St John's College (October 2001–September 2004) and Magdalene College (October 2004–August 2007) offered me the best imaginable conditions (a fully funded Benefactors' Scholarship and a stipendiary Lumley Research Fellowship respectively) for pursuing my research, and I am very glad to acknowledge here my gratitude to the fellows, members and staff of both colleges. Warm thanks also go to my colleagues and students at the Department of Classics and Ancient History of Durham University for the friendly and stimulating working environment in which the final revision of this book took place.

An earlier and much shorter version of part I was published as Castagnoli 2007. Section 2 of chapter 4 of part I is a heavily abridged and revised version of Castagnoli 2004a. Chapter 14 of part III is a substantially revised and extended version of Castagnoli 2000.

Notes on the texts and translations

I have tried to present translations (which, unless otherwise stated, are mine) of the ancient texts which are as noncommittal as possible (if anything like a noncommittal translation exists), indicating in parentheses the bits of the original texts which are more significant for my discussion and interpretation, and providing in the footnotes the full Greek or Latin text. Unless otherwise stated, the editions I have followed are the most recent standard editions.

Symbols abbreviations

\neg	not (negation)
\rightarrow	if . . . then (implication)
\wedge	and (conjunction)
\vee	or (disjunction)
\leftrightarrow	if and only if (equivalence)
\forall	for every (universal quantifier)
\exists	for some (existential quantifier)
\vdash	derivation
T	true
F	false
<text>	<implicit or unstated>
[text]	[my explanation or addition]
...	gap in my quotation
<...>	lacuna in the original text
AAP	The Sceptic's Argument Against Proof (first introduced on p. 291)
AT	Aristotle's Thesis (first introduced on p. 106)
BT	Boethius' Thesis (first introduced on p. 107)
CM	<i>Consequentia Mirabilis</i> (first introduced on p. 102)
CT	Chrysippus' Thesis (first introduced on p. 109)
IT	Identity Thesis (first introduced on p. 26)
KP	Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception (first introduced on p. 41)
MD	Protagoras' Measure Doctrine (first introduced on p. 41)
PAP	The Sceptic's Proof Against Proof (first introduced on p. 253)
PAP*	The Sceptic's Proof Against Proof (with an exception) (first introduced on p. 289)
PNC	Principle of Non-Contradiction (first introduced on p. 42)

SD	Protagoras' Secret Doctrine (first introduced on p. 42)
$\neg M$	'Nothing more' (Pyrrhonian interpretation) (first introduced on p. 261)
$\neg M^*$	'Nothing more' (dogmatic misinterpretation) (first introduced on p. 262)

Abbreviations of authors and works

Alex. Aphr. <i>in APr.</i> <i>in Metaph.</i> <i>in Top.</i>	Alexander of Aphrodisias <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics</i> <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics</i> <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Topics</i>
Ps.-Alex. <i>in Metaph.</i>	Pseudo-Alexander <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics</i>
Ammon. <i>in Cat.</i>	Ammonius <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Categories</i>
Anselm of Canterbury <i>Ver.</i> <i>Mon.</i>	<i>De Veritate (On Truth)</i> <i>Monologium (Monologue)</i>
Apoll. Dyc. <i>Conj.</i> <i>Synt.</i>	Apollonius Dyscolus <i>De Conjunctionibus (On Connectors)</i> <i>De Syntaxi (On Syntax)</i>
Apul. <i>Int.</i>	Apuleius <i>De Interpretatione (On Interpretation)</i>
Aristoc.	Aristocles of Messene [<i>On Philosophy</i> – excerpts quoted in Eus. <i>PE</i>]
Aristoph. <i>Nu.</i> <i>Vesp.</i>	Aristophanes <i>Nubes (The Clouds)</i> <i>Vespae (The Wasps)</i>
Arist. <i>APr.</i> <i>APo.</i> <i>Ath.</i>	Aristotle <i>Analytica Priora (Prior Analytics)</i> <i>Analytica Posteriora (Posterior Analytics)</i> <i>On the Constitution of Athens</i>

Cat.	Categories
GA	<i>De Generatione Animalium</i> (On the Generation of Animals)
GC	<i>De Generatione et Corruptione</i> (On Coming-to-be and Passing-away)
HA	<i>Historia Animalium</i> (Observation of Animals)
Int.	<i>De Interpretatione</i> (On Interpretation)
Metaph.	Metaphysics
NE	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
Poet.	Poetics
Rhet.	Rhetoric
SE	<i>Sophistici Elenchi</i> (Sophistical Refutations)
Top.	Topics
Ath.	Athenaeus [<i>Deipnosophistae</i> (The Sophists at Dinner)]
Aug.	Augustine
Acad.	<i>Contra Academicos</i> (Against the Academics)
Civ. Dei	<i>De Civitate Dei</i> (On the City of God)
Conf.	<i>Confessiones</i> (Confessions)
Doct. Chr.	<i>De Doctrina Christiana</i> (On the Christian Doctrine)
Lib. Arb.	<i>De Libero Arbitrio</i> (On Free Choice)
Sol.	<i>Soliloquia</i> (Soliloquies)
Trin.	<i>De Trinitate</i> (On the Trinity)
Ver. Rel.	<i>De Vera Religione</i> (On the True Religion)
Vit. Beat.	<i>De Vita Beata</i> (On the Blessed Life)
Boeth.	Boethius
Hyp. Syll.	<i>On Hypothetical Syllogisms</i>
in Cic. Top.	Commentary on Cicero's Topics
Bonaventure of Bagnoregio	
Coll.	<i>Collationes in Hexaemeron</i> (Collations in the Hexaemeron)
Myst. Trin.	<i>De Mysterio Trinitatis</i> (On the Mystery of the Trinity)
in Sent.	<i>Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum</i> (Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentences)

Cic.	Cicero
Ac.	<i>Academica</i> (Academic Books)
Div.	<i>De Divinatione</i> (On Divination)
Fat.	<i>De Fato</i> (On Fate)
Fin.	<i>De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum</i> (On Moral Ends)
Luc.	<i>Lucullus</i> (second book of the first edition of <i>Academica</i>)
Top.	<i>Topica</i> (Topics)
Tusc.	<i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i> (Disputations at Tusculum)
Clem. Alex.	Clement of Alexandria
Strom.	<i>Stromata</i> (Miscellanies)
Damascius	
Princ.	<i>De Principiis</i> (Doubts and Solutions Concerning First Principles)
David	
Prol. Phil.	<i>Prolegomena Philosophiae</i> (Forewords to Philosophy)
D.L.	Diogenes Laertius [<i>Vitae Philosophorum</i> (Lives of Philosophers)]
Diosc. Ped.	Dioscorides Pedanius
Mat. Med.	<i>De Materia Medica</i> (On Medicinal Substances)
Elias	
in Porph. Isag.	Commentary on Porphyry's Introduction
Epict.	Epictetus
Disc.	<i>Discourses</i>
Epic.	Epicurus
Men.	<i>Letter to Menoeceus</i>
SV	<i>Sententiae Vaticanae</i> (Vatican Sayings)
Eurip.	Euripides
Bacch.	<i>Bacchae</i>

Eus. PE	Eusebius of Caesarea <i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i> (Preparation for the Gospel)
Gal. Inst. Log. Libr. Propr. Opt. Doct. Plac. Hipp. et Plat.	Galen <i>Institutio Logica</i> (Introduction to Logic) <i>De Libriis Propriis</i> (On My Own Books) <i>De Optima Doctrina</i> (On the Best Doctrine) <i>De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis</i> (On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato)
Gell. NA	Gellius <i>Noctes Atticae</i> (Attic Nights)
Hipp. Mul. Nat. Hom.	Hippocrates <i>De Mulierum Affectibus</i> (On Women's Affections) <i>De Natura Hominum</i> (On the Nature of Men)
Iambl. Protr.	Iamblichus <i>Protreptic</i>
John Duns Scotus Ordin.	<i>Ordinatio</i> (Ordination)
Lact. Div. Inst.	Lactantius <i>Divinae Institutiones</i> (Divine Institutions)
Lucretius DRN	<i>De Rerum Natura</i> (On Nature)
Numen.	Numenius
Olymp. in Alcib.	Olympiodorus <i>Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades</i>
Origen Cels. in Ev. Ioan.	<i>Contra Celsum</i> (Against Celsus) <i>Commentary on John's Gospel</i>
POxy	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
Paul Tit.	Paul of Tarsus <i>Letter to Titus</i>

Phld. Sign.	Philodemus <i>De Signis</i> (On Signs)
Phot. Bibl.	Photius <i>Bibliotheca</i> (Library)
Pl. Apol. Chrm. Crat. Euthd. Euthphr. Hp. Ma. Phdr. Phlb. Prmd. Prt. Resp. Sph. Tht. Tim.	Plato <i>Apology of Socrates</i> <i>Charmides</i> <i>Cratylus</i> <i>Euthydemus</i> <i>Euthyphro</i> <i>Hippias Major</i> <i>Phaedrus</i> <i>Philebus</i> <i>Parmenides</i> <i>Protagoras</i> <i>Republic</i> <i>Sophist</i> <i>Theaetetus</i> <i>Timaeus</i>
Plotinus Enn.	<i>Enneads</i>
Plut. Alex. Fort. Cohib. Ira Colot. Comm. Not. Cons. ad Apol. Def. Orac. Peric. Prof. Virt. Quaest. Conv.	Plutarch <i>De Alexandri Fortuna aut Virtute</i> (On Alexander's Fortune or Virtue) <i>De Cohibenda Ira</i> (On Controlling Anger) <i>Adversus Colotem</i> (Against Colotes) <i>De Communibus Notitiis</i> (On Common Conceptions) <i>Consolatio ad Apollonium</i> (Consolatory Letter to Apollonius) <i>De Defectu Oraculorum</i> (The Obsolescence of Oracles) <i>Pericles</i> <i>Quomodo Quis Suos in Virtute Sentiat</i> (How One Perceives One's Improvements in Virtue) <i>Quaestiones Conviviales</i> (Table-Talk)

Stoic. Rep.	<i>De Stoicorum Repugnantiiis (On the Contradictions of the Stoics)</i>
Proclus in Prmd. Theol. Plat.	<i>Commentary on Plato's Parmenides</i> <i>Theologia Platonica (Platonic Theology)</i>
Quint. Inst. Orat.	Quintilian <i>Institutio Oratoria (Institutions of Oratory)</i>
schol. in Ammon. in Arist. APr.	Scholium to Ammonius' Commentary on Aristotle's <i>Prior Analytics</i>
Seneca Mor.	<i>Epistulae Morales (Moral Letters)</i>
S.E. M	Sextus Empiricus <i>Adversus Mathematicos</i> (books 1–6: <i>Against the Professors</i> ; books 7–8: <i>Against the Logicians</i> ; books 9–10: <i>Against the Physicists</i> ; book 11: <i>Against the Ethicists</i>)
PH	<i>Pyrrhoneioi Hypotyposeis (Outlines of Pyrrhonism)</i>
Stob. Flor.	Stobaeus <i>Florilegium (Anthology)</i>
Syrian. in Metaph.	Syrianus <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics</i>
Thomas Aquinas Sum. Theol. Ver.	<i>Summa Theologiae (Synopsis of Theology)</i> <i>Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate</i> (<i>Disputed Questions on Truth</i>)

Introduction

πολλαχῶς γὰρ ἐπισταμένων τὸ αὐτὸ μᾶλλον μὲν εἶδέναι φαμέν
τὸν τῷ εἶναι γνωρίζοντα τί τὸ πρᾶγμα ἢ τῷ μὴ εἶναι.

Since we may know the same thing in many ways, we say that he who knows what a certain thing is by what it is knows it better than he who knows it by what it is not.

Aristotle *Metaphysics* B 2, 996b14–16

If a philosophical argument is worth attention, so is its history. Traces it has left in the thought of philosophers who have concerned themselves with it have the historical import they do in part because they reveal aspects, often unexpected ones, of the argument's philosophical interest and significance.¹

With these remarks Myles Burnyeat opened, more than three decades ago, his first masterful study on ancient self-refutation, virtually inaugurating serious inquiry into the subject of this book (in fact, in an important sense, creating it). With our journey through the landscape of ancient self-refutation I would like to offer the reader fresh and compelling corroboration of Burnyeat's thought-provoking *incipit*. Not only does the ancient history of the self-refutation argument deserve our full attention, but careful examination of it can provide important insights into the logic, strengths and limits of the argument itself.

A number of excellent discussions devoted to specific ancient self-refutation arguments have sprung up since (and thanks to) Burnyeat's seminal work. Do we really need another foray into this topic? The fact that this is the first systematic monograph-length analysis of ancient self-refutation aiming at a certain degree of completeness² perhaps suffices to

¹ Burnyeat 1976a: 44.

² Obviously I cannot even dream of having satisfactorily treated (or having just mentioned) all the arguments which might be thought to be relevant. I would be satisfied if the reader did not turn the last page of this book with the feeling that a substantial portion of interesting material had been completely and unjustifiedly ignored.

justify its existence. I hope that the synoptic historical and logical understanding which this book pursues will make its existence worthwhile for anyone interested in philosophical argumentation, favouring at the same time an improvement in depth of analysis of specific arguments which should appeal to those readers who are more interested in familiar Platonic, Aristotelian or sceptical trees and bushes than in the exotic self-refutation wood.³

There are other, more substantial questions, however, which deserve some preliminary discussion. This book aims to provide a comprehensive survey and analysis of the history and logic of ancient self-refutation; satisfactorily delimiting the scope of such an enterprise is itself no easy task. Determining the suitable chronological boundaries for the notion of *ancient* philosophy proved a minor source of hesitation: although my decision to arrive at, and halt with, Augustine, with very few glimpses beyond, is not immune to criticism, I believe the success of the whole project does not depend essentially on the merits of this decision.⁴ The major preliminary challenge was a different one: what should count as an ancient instance of *self-refutation*? The ancients did not possess any single technical term, or even an identifiable set of terms or phrases, for our 'self-refutation': even after the *περιτροπή* ('reversal') jargon gained large currency in the Hellenistic age, it never became so popular as to be adopted for all the arguments which seem to deserve our attention and, at the same time, it also continued to be attached to arguments of little interest, or no interest at all, for our inquiry. By itself this might be no more than a nuisance for the interpreter, who cannot rely on sharp terminological criteria (and ultra-fast *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* and *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* database queries) to identify and catalogue the relevant material.

However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. You resolve to browse the Greek and Roman philosophical literature for early instances, or at least

³ Whitehead once said that the history of western philosophy can be characterised as a series of footnotes to Plato. I would have no qualms if someone appropriated this notorious diagnosis and suggested that the scholarly literature on ancient self-refutation is no more than a series of footnotes to Burnyeat, and that this book is only the latest, albeit most lengthy and, it is hoped, most critically fecund, of these. Although on occasion I will criticise some of Burnyeat's views and arguments, the extent to which my work remains indebted to his cannot but exceed my numerous acknowledgements *ad locum*.

⁴ My inquiry will be limited to ancient Western (e.g. Greek and Roman) philosophers and their self-refutation arguments. For analogous arguments in the Eastern tradition cf. e.g. Visvader 1978, McEvilley 1982, Perrett 1984, Graham 1989: 183–6, Harbsmeier 1998: 344–5.

traces, of self-refutation arguments; you ask yourself what the desiderata of your research are, i.e. what defining features of our notion of self-refutation those ancient arguments should mirror, at least partially and confusedly (for, as some modern readers would certainly contend, the ancients were, after all, quite ancient, and you should not expect too much logical clarity from them); you discover that in fact you do not really know what 'our' self-refutation is, because nothing like an approved definition, or even shared general account, of this notion is available in the literature. More startlingly, there are not even obvious competitors from which we might make a reasoned choice:⁵ the self-refutation jargon is used (and often abused) with a mind-boggling myriad of different senses and nuances, and those who adopt it rarely make any serious effort to explain its exact import. Even the few studies devoted to the logic of self-refutation⁶ cautiously eschew the task of providing us with definitions encompassing the various forms they identify and disentangle. Surely, although there is no precise definition largely agreed upon, there must be some set of features which recur in all or most current analyses and uses of self-refutation? Even such an expectation proves itself too optimistic.

Let us start from the basics, and call 'self-refutation argument' any argument which aims at showing that (and how) something is 'self-refuting', i.e. refutes itself.⁷ At least thus far there should be no room for controversy, although it is worth mentioning that 'self-refutation' and

⁵ I shall assume, dogmatically, that the few definitions of self-refutation which I could find in the literature are not viable options: e.g. 'A statement is self-refuting IFF *either* its meaning *or* the manner or medium of its utterance is *sufficient* to show that it is false' (Sparkes 1991: 59); 'a self-refuting utterance is one which is shown to be false in the very fact of its being made' (Blackburn 1994: 345); 'an utterance is said to be self-refuting if it is possible, as soon as it has been made, for the hearer to infer that it cannot be true' (Mautner 1996: 391); cf. also White 1989: 84 (quoted on p. 359). My analysis will demonstrate that these definitions are inadequate to account for what we seem entitled to identify as ancient instances of self-refutation (but also, more generally, that they are exceedingly narrow and misleading accounts of self-refutation *tout court*).

⁶ The most significant general discussions are contained in Passmore 1961, Mackie 1964, Johnstone 1964, Bonney 1966, Stroud 1968, Boyle 1972, Boyle, Grisez and Tollefsen 1976, Finnis 1977, Vanderveken 1980, Stack 1983, Champlin 1988, Johnstone 1989, White 1989, Page 1992, Herrnstein Smith 1996, Johansson 2003. Relevant material can also be found in the vast literature devoted to 'Moore's paradox' and to the 'pragmatic paradoxes' and 'Moorean absurdities' stemming from it (cf. e.g. Moore 1942, Moore 1944, O'Connor 1948, Cohen 1950, O'Connor 1951, Ebersole 1953, Grant 1958, Hintikka 1962b, Burnyeat 1967–8, McDowell 1980, Sorensen 1988, Haslanger 1992, Williams 1994, Green and Williams 2007).

⁷ What I shall be concerned with is attested self-refutation *arguments*, or at least self-refutation *charges*. Obviously there are many theses and theories in the ancient philosophical literature which might be attacked as somehow self-refuting (their number depends of course on how broad one's concept of self-refutation is), but for which no such attack is documented by our sources: these will not be the object of my attention.

'self-refuting' are not themselves labels favoured universally.⁸ But leaving aside for now the predictable disagreement concerning the 'how', namely concerning the logic of the argument itself, let us focus on the other terms of our *prima facie* innocuous definition. What is that 'something' which is charged with refuting itself? A cursory survey of the literature is sufficient to reveal the range of the different (albeit not always strictly incompatible) answers: propositions, utterances, speech acts, statements, assertions, beliefs, arguments, theories, people, to mention only the most popular ones. Can we agree at least on what the 'refutation' amounts to? What incurs self-refutation is often said to be 'falsified',⁹ sometimes even to be proved 'logically impossible' or 'absurd'; other interpreters maintain, more cautiously, that the self-refuting item is 'only' convicted as somehow unbelievable or unassertable, or pointlessly self-defeating in debate. In certain cases these options are treated as mutually exclusive, in others as dependent on the specific instances or the general types of self-refutation involved.

Obviously not all the competing analyses and uses in currency possess the same degree of plausibility; some additional work might perhaps allow us to distil from them a consistent picture of self-refutation sufficiently broad to meet some consensus and at the same time sufficiently well defined to be adopted as a springboard for our inquiry into ancient self-refutation. I have opted, however, for a rather different approach. I shall not begin by attempting to articulate a decent account of self-refutation on the basis of the modern uses; instead, I will let our quest for ancient self-refutation arguments be guided by a more fluid plurality of concurring provisional criteria, none of which will be assumed to be, by itself, a sufficient or necessary condition for the identification of those arguments. I mention here only the most important of these criteria:

- the occurrence of certain key terms or phrases, such as the Greek or Latin counterparts of 'refutes itself', 'eliminates itself', 'overturns itself', 'throw itself down', 'cancels itself', 'incurs (self-)reversal', will play a primary role in attracting our attention;
- the apparent identity or similarity between some ancient arguments and some examples which recur in modern discussions on self-refutation will be taken into due account;

⁸ Among the alternative labels for self-refutation or some of its forms I signal: 'self-defeat', 'self-referential incoherence/inconsistency', 'pragmatic paradox', 'self-contradiction', 'performative contradiction', 'self-stultification', 'self-destruction', 'recoil', 'turning the tables', 'retortion'.

⁹ Cf. n. 5 above for some examples.

- the existing scholarly literature on the topic will contribute to directing our attention to what has already been identified and discussed, mostly with good reason, as relevant ancient material.

The characteristic features of ancient self-refutation will emerge progressively from our scrutiny of the ancient texts provisionally selected on the basis of the interaction of these informal criteria.

While abstaining from predetermining what self-refutation is, however, I shall attempt here to partially delimit its scope, by explaining what it *is not*, or at least by clarifying what I have decided not to treat as relevant for our purposes.¹⁰

To begin with, I suggest that self-refutation is best kept distinct from *self-contradiction*. The way I intend the latter notion is itself hard to specify in satisfactory formal terms: I take self-contradiction to include all those cases in which a single proposition,¹¹ atomic or compound, either entails or consists of a pair of contradictory propositions. This broad category would thus include instances both of formal self-contradictions, either explicit

$p \wedge \neg p$ It is raining and it is not raining

or implicit

$(p \rightarrow q) \wedge p \wedge \neg q$ If I am using an umbrella, it is raining, and I
am using an umbrella, and it is not raining,

and of analytic self-contradictions, like

The triangle ABC has four sides

(which entails that the figure referred to both has three sides, *qua* triangle, and has not three sides, since it has four).¹² Self-contradictions are also, intuitively, necessary falsehoods (and 'self-falsifying in the sense that they are their own falsitymakers',¹³ as typically shown through *reductio ad*

¹⁰ I am aware that in doing so I am already prejudging some of the open issues concerning the subject, nature and outcome of self-refutation which I have individuated above.

¹¹ Derivatively, we can also speak of self-contradicting sentences, statements, beliefs, etc. (i.e. of all those items having a self-contradicting propositional content).

¹² The difficulty of defining these notions rigorously emerges immediately with formal self-contradiction: in classical logic any logically impossible proposition entails anything whatsoever (*ex impossibili quodlibet*), and thus also any pair of contradictory propositions. 'Self-contradiction' is in fact a typical label in logic textbooks for those formulae which are false for any possible interpretation of their variables (often in opposition to 'tautology'). A more robust notion of *entailment* is presupposed by my distinction (incidentally, some such more robust notion seems to have been favoured by ancient logicians; cf. section 1 of chapter 6). The question of what counts as a single proposition is also far from trivial (on Aristotle's diffidence towards conjunction as a means to form compound propositions cf. e.g. Geach 1963).

¹³ Johansson 2003: 662.

impossible), and are rejected as such in most logical systems.¹⁴ One might argue that self-refutation must be a subspecies of self-contradiction: on some analyses, a proposition refutes itself when it entails its own contradictory, and since anything seems to entail itself as well, any self-refuting p would always entail the contradiction $p \wedge \neg p$. I shall not assess this view at this stage;¹⁵ it is sufficient here to have identified a large class of self-contradictions which will not be part of our study.

A key feature of the notion of self-contradiction as I have just outlined it is that it is a single propositional item that is properly called self-contradicting. However, 'self-contradiction' is also adopted, loosely, with reference to more complex items, and it is especially in this sense that we find it often used interchangeably with 'self-refutation'. Think of typical allegations such as 'You are contradicting yourself!', or 'That theory is self-contradictory': they do not necessarily suggest that the interlocutor has accepted a self-contradicting proposition in the sense outlined above, or that a theory includes any self-contradicting thesis. More often than not, such allegations express the charge that your interlocutor made (two or more) distinct inconsistent claims, or that a theory includes (two or more) distinct inconsistent theses. This *inconsistency* can assume a variety of forms. In the most trivial one, for example, Tom says that p ('Plato was a better philosopher than Aristotle') on Monday and that not- p ('Plato was not a better philosopher than Aristotle') on Tuesday; or, more subtly, Tom says that p ('Plato was a better philosopher than Aristotle') on Monday, says that q ('Aristotle was a better philosopher than Parmenides') on Tuesday and says that r ('Parmenides was a better philosopher than Plato') on Wednesday, where q and r jointly entail not- p . I shall call this '*diachronic inconsistency*' between Tom's various claims. Suppose that, on the contrary, Tom believes that p , q and r at the same time, without realising that q and r jointly entail not- p : in such a situation (which, incidentally, occurs to all of us often enough) Tom is holding *synchronically* inconsistent beliefs. If we broaden our perspective to Tom's system of beliefs (or set of utterances) as a whole, of course we are entitled to speak of self-contradiction, or to protest that Tom is contradicting himself (the conjunction of the propositional contents of his beliefs would be a self-contradiction in the strictest sense explained above); however, none of the propositions Tom takes to be true can thereby be singled out as self-contradicting (or self-refuting).

¹⁴ Some non-classical systems of logic admit contradictions (cf. e.g. Priest's (1987) 'dialetheism').

¹⁵ One of the main contentions of this book will be precisely that self-refutation is not a case of a proposition entailing its own contradictory and thereby being demonstrably false.

The inconsistent 'items' need not belong to the same category. One interesting species of inconsistency, which we can label '*pragmatic inconsistency*', typically involves a clash between what one *says*, on the one hand, and what one *does*, on the other. Pragmatic inconsistency itself has a variety of distinct nuances and manifestations. Let us consider only a couple of them which will be particularly relevant for our purposes:

- (1) what one says can take the form of some sort of general advice or norm ('People should not smoke') and what one does can be an open violation of it (smoking cigarettes), stimulating the evergreen censure 'You don't practise what you preach';
- (2) what one says can be some factual claim ('I cannot read ancient Greek') and what one does something which either directly falsifies it (reading Plato in the original), or appears to involve presuppositions and implications which, if true, would falsify it (selecting Burnet's Oxford Classical Texts edition of Plato's *Theaetetus* as my bedtime reading for this week).

I suggest that the various forms of self-contradiction and inconsistency which I have sketchily outlined should be carefully kept distinct from self-refutation, while recognising that the edges between all these notions are not always as sharp as we might desire.¹⁶ Independently of its theoretical merits, I hope that my rough *via negativa* to self-refutation will serve its contingent purpose of conveying some preliminary idea (and warning) of what the reader should not expect to find in the pages of this book. Standard *reductio ad impossibile* arguments, which on my account are located in the sphere of self-contradiction, will not be on our menu (although some of my contentions concerning the logic of ancient self-refutation might have consequences for some forms of ancient *reductio* as well). The elenchus (Socratic, Aristotelian or otherwise) will also lie beyond the scope of my analysis, since its gist seems to remain, through all its varieties, intended aims and interpretations, that of unmasking hidden inconsistencies between sets of beliefs, concessions, theses;¹⁷ for the same

¹⁶ For some further reflections on this distinction cf. the conclusion.

¹⁷ *Contra* Robinson (1953: 1–32), according to whom the Socratic *elenchus* is usually 'indirect': the thesis subjected to elenchus entails (typically alone, but sometimes in conjunction with others) something false or impossible (in most cases, a self-contradiction), so the Socratic elenchus would be more similar to a *reductio ad absurdum* than to a proof of inconsistency. I believe Robinson's interpretation of the elenchus does not square well with Plato's texts, but it is worth mentioning here that Vlastos badly misrepresents it when he describes it in terms which would make of the 'indirect elenchus' a form of self-refutation argument: 'when the answerer asserts p , Socrates would derive not- p either directly from p or else by deriving from p some further premisses which entail not- p – in either case deducing not- p from p "without the aid of any extra-premiss"' (1983: 29). For an incorrect interpretation of the Socratic elenchus analogous to the one which Vlastos wrongly

reason, Plutarch, with the material sedulously collected in his *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* (*On the Contradictions of the Stoics*), will not be a hero of our story. The charge of pragmatic inconsistency was a favourite weapon in ancient philosophical controversy: while its history would certainly deserve a comprehensive investigation analogous to the one I am undertaking here for self-refutation, my tentative map of various types of refutation has banned it from the ground covered in this book. Also the notorious Liar Paradox, for reasons to be explained in chapter 1, will make only a cursory appearance on the stage, to be quickly dismissed.

As I have explained, I shall not presuppose or adopt any specific modern account of self-refutation to guide and shape our study of ancient self-refutation arguments. I shall often refer, however, to John Mackie's (1964) formal taxonomy of different types of self-refutation. This preference has a double rationale: not only does Mackie's analysis remain one of the most rigorous and finely nuanced on the market, but it has also become, through Burnyeat's partial adoption of it, the unchallenged benchmark in most subsequent literature on ancient self-refutation. Although Mackie's analysis will receive large and well-deserved attention, I shall not assume it to be a privileged route to the correct identification, interpretation and assessment of ancient self-refutation arguments; actually I shall express various reservations about the extent to which it can be borrowed for our purpose and, more fundamentally, to which it succeeds in clarifying some fundamental aspects of the logic of self-refutation itself. I shall also refrain, as far as possible, from casting my analysis within any other specific modern theoretical framework: although I have no doubt that the conceptual apparatus offered, among others, by pragmatics, speech act theories, and dialectical, doxastic and epistemic logics could sometimes prove helpful, I believe that our research will be best conducted and presented in a setting which remains neutral between such theories and their technical (and often controversial) distinctions and jargon.

The same kind of plurality of approaches is reflected in the structure of this book: in part I the ancient self-refutation arguments will be collected, analysed, assessed and compared on the basis of the similarity of the positions under attack; in part II the structural analogy in the logical patterns of the self-refutation arguments themselves will be the main organising

attributes to Robinson (and along the lines of the so-called *Consequentia Mirabilis*: cf. chapter 6, section 1 below) cf. Hall 1967: 386: 'This is a logically valid procedure, for it corresponds to the logical law "if p implies not- p , then not- p is true"'. On the Socratic elenchus cf. also Benson 1995, Scott 2002; on the Aristotelian elenchus cf. Bolton 1993, Cavini 1993b, Gobbo 1997; on the Stoic conception of elenchus cf. Repici 1993.

principle; part III will be devoted, finally, to the investigation of the crucial role the self-refutation charge played in the ancient debates between sceptics and dogmatists and of the way in which that charge contributed to shaping those debates and ancient scepticism itself. I hope that the asymmetry resulting from these different perspectives will enhance, rather than weaken, the quality and structure of the exposition and our sense of the importance of the self-refutation argument in ancient philosophy.

But it is time now to make the acquaintance of our mysterious beast.

PART I

Truth, falsehood and self-refutation

Insignem continent Veritatis astum hae demonstrationes, quo illa hostium suorum armis in eorum perniciem pro se abutitur; sed imprimis Dilemmate velut incantamento cogitur Veritatis hostis de industria, pro Veritate tamquam pro aris et focis dimicare.

These demonstrations contain a remarkable stratagem of Truth, by which she uses the weapons of her enemies for their own undoing and to her own advantage; but especially the enemy of Truth is deliberately forced by the Dilemma, like by a spell, to fight for Truth as if he were fighting for his own hearth and home.

Arnold Geulincx, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*
8 (= 1891-3: vol. II, 473)

Preliminaries

Among the theses which ancient philosophers charged with self-refutation (or, more precisely, with what modern readers have tended to identify with 'our'¹ self-refutation), we can single out a homogeneous class including 'Everything is true', 'Everything is false' and other similar theses (e.g. 'Every appearance is true', 'To speak falsely is impossible', 'Nothing is true', 'Truth could perish'). The arguments which the ancients devised and used to convict such theses of self-refutation will be the protagonists of the first part of our study. Before plunging into those arguments, however, some brief preliminary remarks are needed.

To begin with, it is worth noticing that those theses have attracted very meagre attention in modern discussions of self-refutation: as we shall see, only 'Nothing is true' was taken into account by Mackie in his influential formal analysis, but it was neglected in the subsequent section exploring the philosophical dividends of that analysis. The diagnosis of this apparent lack of interest is not difficult: such theses will sound to modern ears too blatantly absurd, and thereby philosophically uninteresting, to be worthy even of refutation. However, one man's absurdity is another man's deep insight, or at least another man's *ben trovato*: after all, as (the philosopher) Cicero once wrote, 'nothing so absurd can be said that it has not been said by some philosopher'.² The problem of accounting for the nature and existence of falsehood and the metaphysical and epistemological puzzle of how it is even possible to think and say something false were live issues for a long time in antiquity, and among the priorities on the philosophical agendas of thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle.³ Radical views such as 'Nothing is false' and 'Everything is true' were not only proposed by some, but also deemed to deserve attention and require refutation by their eminent opponents.

¹ For a disclaimer on the use of 'our' cf. the introduction.

² *Nihil tam absurde dici potest quod non dicatur ab aliquo philosophorum* (Cic. *Div.* 2.58.119).

³ For the fascinating history of the problem and its solution cf. Denyer 1991.

The contrary position, according to which nothing is true (and real) had its flagbearers too, not only in the now obscure Xenias,⁴ but also in the tradition, 'sceptical' and 'nihilistic', variously embodied (at least according to some dubious ancient interpretations) by renowned figures such as Gorgias (fifth century BC),⁵ Anaxarchus and Monimus (fourth century BC).⁶

From this perspective, we should be very careful not to confuse 'Everything is false' and 'Everything is true' with the Liar and the Truth-Teller. The latter were *arguments* (often branded as σοφίσματα, 'sophisms', or ἀποροὶ λόγοι, 'insoluble arguments'), which ancient logicians perceived as a serious menace to the foundations of their logic, whereas, however surprising this might appear to us, the former were advanced as genuine philosophical *theses*, never making their appearance in any ancient list of sophisms or *insolubilia*. While the reconstruction of the ancient responses to the threat posed by the Liar and the Truth-Teller is extremely controversial, and, given the scantiness of our evidence, deeply conjectural,⁷ we are sufficiently well informed on the ancient reactions to 'Everything is false', 'Everything is true' and analogous theses to provide an analysis which can aspire to be both accurate and instructive on the nature of ancient logic. What we do know for certain about the ancient Liar is that it gave ancient logicians no fewer headaches than its modern versions have afforded to their heirs: Philetas of Cos is reported to have eventually fallen victim to the sleepless nights devoted to it,⁸ and, if without any such dramatic finale, Chrysippus himself certainly had to expend enormous energy to solve it, given that the catalogue of his writings seems to attest to no fewer than twelve works in twenty-three books dedicated to the presentation and

⁴ Cf. pp. 97 and 117. ⁵ Cf. p. 238n119.

⁶ Cf. e.g. S.E. *M* 7.88: 'Anaxarchus and Monimus... likened what is to a scene-painting, and held it to resemble what strikes us in dreams and madness' ('Ανάρχον δὲ καὶ Μόνημον... σκηνογραφία ἀπείκασαν τὰ ὄντα τοῖς τε κατὰ ὕπνου ἢ μανίαν προσπίπτουσι ταῦτα ὁμοιωσθαι ὑπέλαβον); D.L. 6.83: 'For he [sc. Monimus] said that all opinion is but vanity' (τὸ γὰρ ὑποληφθὲν τῷ φον εἶναι πᾶν ἔφη). An interesting conjectural reconstruction of Anaxarchus' and Monimus' actual position has been offered by Burnyeat in his unpublished paper 'All the world's stage painting'. For a possible hint at the fact that Monimus' *dictum* is liable to the self-refutation objection cf. Marcus Aurelius 2.15.

⁷ On the ancient Liar cf. Rüstow 1910. For more recent attempts at reconstructing the ancient solutions to the Liar cf. Cavini 1993a, Mignucci 1999a and 1999b, Crivelli 2004a and p. 297n140. For an introductory survey of the medieval solutions to the Liar cf. Spade 1982. For an introduction to the Liar Paradox and some modern analyses of it cf. Haack 1978: 135–48.

⁸ This is Philetas' epitaph, as reported by Athenaeus (9.64, 34–5):

Ξεῖνε, Φιλήτας εἰμί. λόγων ὁ ψευδόμενός με ὤλεσε καὶ νυκτῶν φροντίδες ἐσπέραιοι.

Stranger, I am Philetas. The Liar argument killed me, and the nocturnal cares <it gave me>.

defence of his own solution and criticism of others'.⁹ We shall soon discover that, on the contrary, the self-refutation charges against 'Everything is false' are typically very simple and straightforward in their logic, and sometimes depicted as almost trivial by their own proponents: if we judge by the tone of the testimonies available to us, whereas the Liar argument was perceived as a real challenge by ancient logicians, the 'Everything is false' thesis was regarded as an embarrassment only for its naïve supporters.¹⁰

One might protest that, after all, the latter cannot be less paradoxical than (and should be treated along the same lines as) the 'Epimenides' (the notorious claim of Epimenides the Cretan that 'All the Cretans speak falsely'),¹¹ which is not a straightforward logical falsehood, but either false (if some truth has ever been said by a Cretan) or Liar-paradoxical (if all other Cretan statements are false, or neither Epimenides himself nor any other Cretan ever said anything else).¹² I shall suggest that the fact that ancient self-refutation arguments appear innocent of this complexity does not betray any logical deficiency on the part of their proposers; instead, it comes as invaluable, albeit indirect, evidence that, unlike the ancient reflections on the Liar and many modern analyses of the self-refutation

⁹ Cf. D.L. 7.196–7 and Barnes 1996.

¹⁰ For analogous reasons I shall not deal with 'convertible arguments' (ἀντιστρέφοντες λόγοι), i.e. argument patterns which are liable to be turned round against their proponent in such a way that both sides end up having equal force. A typical example in the ancient sources is that of the quarrel between Corax, a teacher of rhetoric, and his pupil Tisias, who had agreed that he would pay Corax the tuition fee only after winning his first case, but purposely delayed going into practice and thus paying. Corax sued Tisias, arguing in court that if he won the case, then Tisias should pay as decided by the judges, and if he lost it, then Tisias should pay because Tisias would then have won his first case. Tisias counterargued that if he won, he should not pay as decided by the judges, and if he lost he should not pay because he would not have won his first case yet. The judges could not decide in favour of either side, and drove both Corax and Tisias out of court. (Some sources have Protagoras as the teacher and Euathlus as his pupil; cf. also Aristophanes' *Clouds* for a hint at a similar argument: Strepsiades swears that after Socrates teaches him enough sophistry to evade his creditors, Strepsiades will pay Socrates – who clearly will be one of his creditors by then – a huge fee). The proponent of a convertible argument can be opposed by an argument with the same logical structure (in the example above a constructive dilemma with contradictory antecedents in the two conditional premisses) but opposite conclusion, but he is not the clear-cut loser in the debate, which has no obvious solution ('convertible arguments' were often classified, like the Liar, among the ἀποροὶ). For the difference between 'convertible arguments' and self-refutation cf. Burnyeat 1976a: 67–9; for ample discussion of 'convertible arguments' cf. Nuchelmans 1991: 13, 49, 64–75.

¹¹ Cf. Paul *Tit.* 1, 12–13: 'One of them [sc. the Cretans], a prophet of their own [sc. Epimenides], said: "Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true' (εἰπὲν τις ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἴδιος αὐτῶν προφήτης: Κρήτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται, κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί, ἡ μαρτυρία αὕτη ἐστὶν ἀληθής).

¹² Cf. Koyre 1946, Prior 1958, Mackie 1973 (and *pace* Paul! cf. n. 11 above). We do not know whether the 'Epimenides' was treated together with the 'Eubulides' ('I'm saying something false') in the ancient analyses of the Liar. Analogously, 'Everything is true' should be either false or Truth-Teller-paradoxical.

argument, those arguments did *not* aim at establishing the truth-value of certain propositions, but served a different purpose.

What this purpose was, how the ancients tried to achieve it, and the crucial difference, in logic and aim, between ancient and modern approaches to self-refutation will emerge progressively as our scrutiny of the ancient texts advances.

CHAPTER 2

A modern approach: Mackie on the absolute self-refutation of 'Nothing is true'

Let us start from the end of our story. Almost half a century after its first publication in 1964, Mackie's formal analysis of the logic of self-refutation remains the gold standard, on account both of its undeniable merits and of the relative scarcity of previous and subsequent attempts.¹ Perhaps even more important, it has become, thanks to Burnyeat's partial adoption of it, the benchmark in most subsequent literature on ancient self-refutation. Let us consider, then, what Mackie's analysis can teach us about the self-refutation of 'Nothing is true', by dissecting the logic of that analysis.

After introducing 'pragmatic self-refutation', to which we shall return in part II, chapter 10, Mackie examines a second type, which he labels 'absolute self-refutation', distinguishing two varieties of it, based on two different properties of the main operators involved: 'It is true that' has both properties, and thus is involved, in different ways, in both varieties. To begin with, Mackie lists 'It is true that' among the *truth-entailing* operators (with 'I know that' and 'It can be proved that'), that is those operators *d*'s for which if *dp* is true, *p* itself must be true also' (1964: 194). On the basis of this law, Mackie constructs the following argument (195):²

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) $(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow p)$ | T is truth-entailing |
| (2) $T(\neg(\exists p)Tp) \rightarrow \neg(\exists p)Tp$ | From (1), by substitution |
| (3) $T(\neg(\exists p)Tp) \rightarrow (\exists p)Tp$ | Existential generalisation |
| (4) $\neg T(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$ | From (2) and (3), by destructive dilemma $((p \rightarrow q) \wedge (p \rightarrow \neg q)) \rightarrow \neg p$ |

Mackie clarifies what exactly an argument of this form is supposed to prove:

With absolute self-refutation of this sort, an item that would be symbolized by $d(\neg(\exists p)dp)$, such as my knowing that I know nothing [or it being true that nothing

¹ Cf. p. 3n6.

² I translate, here and hereafter, the Polish notation adopted by Mackie into a more easily readable notation.

is true], simply cannot occur. Here we can say that each *proposition* of this form is self-refuting. It must be false; given that *d* is truth-entailing, its form guarantees its falsehood. (195)

Mackie's formal argument looks unimpeachable: logic itself shows that it cannot be the case that it is true that nothing is true. More careful inspection, however, reveals that Mackie's analysis is affected by a potentially dangerous ambiguity. It is not clear how Mackie wants us to understand the conclusion (4), of which he himself presents in fact at least two different paraphrases:

- (4*) It is not the case (and it cannot be the case) that it is true that nothing is true.³
- (4**) The proposition 'It is true that nothing is true' is (necessarily) false.

The former declares the impossibility of a certain state of affairs obtaining, the latter the necessary falsehood of a certain proposition. (4*) and (4**) are, of course, strictly related: ordinarily we would have no qualms about subscribing to their equivalence

- (4*) if and only if (4**)

but we shall discover shortly that their difference can turn out to be significant in certain cases. Mackie's wavering understanding of the main negation symbol ('It is not the case that . . . ' or ' . . . is false') is not the only ambiguity to be detected by a pedantic reader in his double paraphrase of (4). In an analogous way, T is taken sometimes as the sentential operator 'It is true that . . . ' (equivalent, I presume, to 'It is the case that', attached to obtaining states of affairs) and sometimes as the truth-predicate ' . . . is true' (attached to propositions, sentences or whatever one might decide the truth-bearers are).⁴ 'It is true that nothing is true', Mackie's own explicit interpretation of $T(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$, is thus an odd hybrid of these understandings of T. Consistency would require either

- (1) It is the case that nothing is the case

or

- (2) (The proposition) 'Nothing (i.e. no proposition) is true' is true

³ In the passage I have quoted above Mackie uses the phrase 'cannot occur', which I suppose he takes as equivalent to 'it cannot be the case' (a few lines before he gives another example of the conclusion of an absolute self-refutation argument: 'it cannot be the case that it can be proved that nothing can be proved').

⁴ As we have seen, Mackie's official account treats T, like all the other *d*'s, as an operator (193).

and, again, (1) and (2), although strictly related, do not express exactly the same thesis (for example (2), unlike (1), is committed to the existence of entities like propositions and of truth as a property of propositions). If we combine Mackie's two different renderings of the first negation with his two different understandings of T, and charitably read T consistently inside the same formula, we get four different interpretations for the conclusion (4) of the self-refutation argument:

- (4a) It cannot be the case that it is the case that nothing is the case.
- (4b) It cannot be the case that (the proposition) 'Nothing (i.e. no proposition) is true' is true.
- (4c) The proposition 'It is the case that nothing is the case' is necessarily false.
- (4d) The proposition "Nothing (i.e. no proposition) is true" is true' is necessarily false.⁵

One could protest that this indeterminacy is not, after all, very disturbing, since Mackie's conclusion appears to be sound (and soundly inferred from the premisses) under all these interpretations (provided one interprets the premisses accordingly). It will shortly become clear why this kind of relaxed attitude is not to be recommended, when we come to Mackie's second (and for us more interesting) form of absolute self-refutation.

But let us grant for the moment that the argument sketched above is acceptable as it stands: is it a proof that $T(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$ (in Mackie's own paraphrase, 'It is true that nothing is true') is necessarily false (or 'cannot occur') *by self-refutation*? Mackie's formal argument shows that this formula cannot be accepted because it entails both members of a contradiction: under one of its possible interpretations, for example, the proposition "Nothing is true" is true' entails both 'Nothing is true' (by the truth-entailing property of T) and 'Something is true' (by existential generalisation: if 'Nothing is true' is true, then certainly there is something true, this very proposition). Is this a sufficient condition for self-refutation? Since Mackie does not offer us any general definition of self-refutation, and there is no such definition agreed upon in the literature, as I have explained in the introduction, providing an answer is a fuzzy task. (Socratically, one could fear that it is indeed an impossible task: how can you know whether something is *x*, when you do not know what *x* is?) However, I have argued in the introduction that analogous cases are best kept distinct from self-refutations, and more appropriately catalogued as *self-contradictions*; Mackie himself comes

⁵ Here and below I follow Mackie in modalising the possible interpretations of (4).

close to admitting as much towards the end of his article, when he recognises that detecting absolute self-refutations with truth-entailing operators is not philosophically fecund, since 'we are merely avoiding logical contradictions' (203). In fact, we have no evidence of any ancient philosopher having endorsed a blatantly self-contradictory thesis such as 'It is true that nothing is true' or 'The truth is: nothing is true' (a clear counterexample, incidentally, of the Ciceronian 'principle of uncharity' mentioned on p. 13).⁶

It is time now to consider Mackie's second and more interesting type of absolute self-refutation involving the truth operator (predicate?) T. According to Mackie, T is not only truth-entailing, but also a member of the class of *d*'s 'which we may call *prefixable*, that is ones for which if *p* itself is true, *dp* must also be true' (195). On 'T-prefixability' Mackie erects the following proof:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) $(\forall p)(p \rightarrow Tp)$ | T-prefixability |
| (2) $\neg(\exists p)Tp \rightarrow T(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$ | From (1), by substitution |
| (3) $T(\neg(\exists p)Tp) \rightarrow (\exists p)Tp$ | Existential generalisation |
| (4) $\neg(\exists p)Tp \rightarrow \neg(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$ | From (2) and (3), by transitivity and double negation |
| (5) $\neg(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$ | From (4), by the law $(p \rightarrow \neg p) \rightarrow \neg p$ |

In what follows, and especially in section 1 of chapter 6, we shall become very well acquainted with the 'law' of classical logic which warrants the crucial inference from (4) to (5): $(p \rightarrow \neg p) \rightarrow \neg p$, a form of the so-called *Consequentia Mirabilis* ('the marvellous consequence'). Let us focus now on conclusion (5) instead: how should we construe it? Given the ambiguities I have pointed out above, Mackie would seem to be committed to four different interpretations, all of which he must consider sound:

- (5a) It cannot be the case that nothing is the case.
- (5b) It cannot be the case that nothing (i.e. no proposition) is true.
- (5c) The proposition 'Nothing is the case' is necessarily false.
- (5d) The proposition 'Nothing (i.e. no proposition) is true' is necessarily false.⁷

⁶ We shall see that some ancient philosophers have been accused of being unwittingly committed, by self-refutation, to such a contradiction (cf. chapter 6, section 2).

⁷ Mackie's own unique paraphrase of (5) is "There are no truths" is absolutely self-refuting and "There are some truths" is necessarily true' (197), which is equivalent to (5d).

At least two of these immediately strike me as dubious. How could Mackie prove anything like (5b)? Suppose – as someone as sophisticated as the medieval philosopher John Buridan (fourteenth century) might protest – that God had annihilated all true propositions: doubtless no proposition would be true, therefore the state of affairs that no proposition is true, although not *possibly-true* (i.e. not something which can itself be expressed through a true proposition), seems to be *possible*, i.e. something which could be the case.⁸ Mackie's conclusion asks us to accept that, somehow, such possibility is barred by logic: but, in the absence of further clarification and support of certain tacit assumptions of Mackie's argument (e.g. concerning the nature of the truth-bearers), it is difficult to see why this should be the case.⁹ Did Mackie establish, as a remarkable by-product of his elegant argument, that necessarily either God does not exist or is not omnipotent? Reading (5d) is no less problematic. Certainly the proposition 'No proposition is true' cannot be true, but suppose, again, that no other proposition existed, or that only false propositions existed (something that Mackie's formal self-refutation argument, as it stands, cannot exclude): 'No proposition is true' would be paradoxical, for the very same reasons which make the Liar assertion 'I'm saying the false' paradoxical,¹⁰ and thus the diagnosis that it is necessarily false, by self-refutation, appears hasty.

The conclusion (5) has turned out to be much less palatable and to require much more cautious reflection than we might have thought at first glance. But how was it reached? The key step of Mackie's argument, (2), is an exemplification of T-prefixability: on one of its possible interpretations – the one eventually leading to the two readings of the conclusion just discussed, (5b) and (5d) – premiss (2) can be paraphrased as 'If nothing is true, then "Nothing is true" is true'. Is this kernel of the self-refutation argument rock solid? As an instance of T-prefixability, (2) seems to be perfectly sound, on a par with all the other instances of 'semantic ascent': if snow is white then 'Snow is white' is true, if $2 + 2 = 5$ then ' $2 + 2 = 5$ '

⁸ Borrowing and adapting an important logical distinction which Prior 1969 extracted from Buridan's remarks in *Sophismata* 8.

⁹ Adopting modern jargon, for Buridan a *propositio* is 'a meaningful sentence token (i.e. a particular utterance or inscription), spoken or written with assertive intent' (Hughes 1982: 5). It is easy to see then how certain *propositiones* could be annihilated. This need not be Mackie's own conception of 'proposition', which unfortunately he fails to clarify in his article; the use of 'statement' (1964: 194) and the claim that T-prefixability is a 'condition of discourse' (202) might suggest, however, that Mackie's 'propositions' are quite concrete linguistic items, not unlike Buridan's *propositiones*. For discussion of further difficulties which an argument like Mackie's can incur even if one adopts a different reading of (5), or a different view of what a proposition is, cf. also chapter 7, and especially p. 126n10.

¹⁰ Cf. the analogous possibility with the Epimenides (p. 15).

is true, etc. Since T-prefixability takes for granted the existence of truth, however, one could protest that to employ it here, to disprove that 'Nothing is true', is question begging. 'Nothing is true' is obviously inconsistent with T-prefixability, and thus it comes as no surprise that by assuming the latter Mackie can produce a refutation of the former. Although we lack a proper definition of self-refutation to which we can make appeal, however, I believe it is not a merely idiosyncratic suggestion to say that a self-refutation argument should show how a certain thesis is refuted by itself alone or, at most, with the help of certain other presuppositions or consequences of it which have been, or would necessarily be, granted by its proponent as a result of endorsing that thesis. But no lucid supporter of the thesis that 'Nothing is true' (assuming for the sake of argument that there might be one) would grant T-prefixability, and hence step (2) in Mackie's argument: by advancing his extraordinary thesis he is likely to be at the same time implicitly asking us to revise our most basic intuitions about truth, and T-prefixability is no doubt high in the list.¹¹

Assessing a 'revolutionary' thesis (the denial of any truth) against an extraneous 'conservative' setting (our basic principles concerning truth) produces a refutation that appears suspiciously easy.¹² This is not to deny that such a strategy, which we will find often used in ancient texts, can be successful and instructive: the boundary between my begging the question by tacitly foisting upon you admissions you would never grant, on the one hand, and your changing the subject or giving up meaningful discussion by stubbornly refusing to grant me anything whatsoever which is recognised as a defining feature of the subject, on the other, can be quite indeterminate. 'If truth is not the kind of thing that is always prefixable, I do not even know what you are talking about when you say that nothing is true', a supporter of Mackie's argument could object. My contention is, however, that this kind of strategy should not be presented as a purely *formal* argument, as Mackie does, without clarifying the crucial presuppositions that are really at stake in the denial and defence of a certain thesis (and certainly should not be presented as an uncontroversial and paradigmatic case of self-refutation). But what seems to me especially problematic is Mackie's emphasis that with absolute self-refutation, unlike 'pragmatic' and 'operational' self-refutation (to be discussed in part II), it is the self-refuting propositional content that falsifies itself, *all by itself*: not only is a supplementary assumption

(T-prefixability) required, but the substantial burden of the refutation is carried by it, and not by the alleged self-refuting proposition.

Furthermore, we have seen that Mackie's tactic delivers, on this occasion, questionable (or at best ambiguous) conclusions, which confirms that reassessing the whole issue from a quite different perspective could produce instructive results. Starting from the next chapter, we shall begin to appreciate the difference, both in logic and in purpose, between Mackie's absolute self-refutation and various self-refutation arguments levelled by the ancients against the proponents of theses like 'Nothing is true' and 'Everything is false'.

¹¹ For an argument along these lines cf. chapter 5, section 1.

¹² For a similar qualm about the possibility of establishing basic philosophical or logical principles by 'reaffirmation through denial' (i.e. by proof of the absolute self-refutation of their denials) cf. Lewis 1921 and Bellissima and Pagli 1996: 157–9.

CHAPTER 3

Setting the ancient stage: Dissoi Logoi 4.6

Democritus (mid fifth–fourth century BC) might be the first figure whom our sources credit with having levelled a clear self-refutation charge at a thesis belonging to the family we are interested in (the Protagorean ‘Every appearance is true’). It has been plausibly observed, however, that our late source for Democritus’ argument, Sextus Empiricus,¹ employs technical jargon and an argumentative structure which ‘bespeak a more sophisticated consciousness of logical form than we may suppose was to be found several centuries earlier in the polemic of Democritus against Protagoras’,² and are likely to represent a legacy of later (in particular Hellenistic) reflections and developments. For this reason I shall consider Sextus’ testimony on Democritus’ anti-Protagorean argument together with other related Sextan evidence in chapter 6, postponing its scrutiny to a more advanced phase of our inquiry.

With Democritus temporarily sidelined, the earliest argument³ relevant for us here could be one contained in the fourth chapter of the untitled anonymous treatise usually referred to as *Δισσοὶ λόγοι* (*Twofold Arguments*) from its opening words.⁴ This sophistic-style collection of arguments for and against various theses was included by Diels in his *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (1903) and is standardly dated around 400 BC;⁵ this dating, however, was more recently (and compellingly) questioned as wholly speculative by Conley and Burnyeat, who argued that, as far as

our poor evidence can show, the *Dissoi Logoi* could actually have been written centuries after 404 BC (the likely *terminus a quo*).⁶ While granting this cautionary view on the possibility of dating the *Dissoi Logoi* with any precision, I believe it is not too wildly conjectural to assume that this work draws ultimately (if only indirectly) on sources belonging to the sophistic milieu of the late fifth–early fourth century BC,⁷ or at least represents a very successful later attempt to mimic them as faithfully as possible.⁸ Even if the author should be much later, no evidence suggests that in the short passage in which we shall be interested he might be contaminating the material he was working on with anachronistic insertions.⁹ Therefore, I shall begin my survey of ancient self-refutation texts from the *Dissoi Logoi*, without committing myself to any specific view about its actual date or authorship.

Let us narrow our focus. We are in the middle of the fourth chapter, ‘On truth and falsehood’ (Περὶ ἀλαθείας καὶ ψευδέος);¹⁰ the author has just presented some arguments in support of the thesis that the true λόγος and the false λόγος are the same thing¹¹ (henceforth, ‘Identity Thesis’, IT), and now is ready to offer a series of arguments for the opposite conclusion that ‘the false λόγος and the true λόγος are different things’ (4.6). Here is how the first of these arguments runs:

ΤΙ For if one were to ask (ἔρωτάσαι) those who say that the same λόγος is false and true which of the two their own λόγος is, if <their reply were> ‘false’, it is clear that <the false and the true λόγος> would be two things, while if they were to answer (ἀποκρίναιτο)¹² ‘true’, then this very <λόγος> would be also false.¹³ (4.6)

The first point to notice is that this argument rephrases IT as ‘the same λόγος is false and true’, and the structure of the refutation itself indicates that this must be in turn understood as ‘any λόγος *whatsoever* is

¹ S.E. *M* 7.389–90 (T23 on p. 95). ² Burnyeat 1976a: 47.

³ In part 1 of the book I shall attempt to follow a chronological order, to verify whether some kind of evolution, or at least transformation, in the logic of the self-refutation arguments can be ascertained. Needless to say, this attempt is bound to face the familiar difficulty of establishing the relative dates of some authors and works with sufficient precision: I hope that a tentative (and admittedly disputable) chronological order will be at least more functional than no order at all.

⁴ The phrase occurs also in the opening sentence of the next three chapters. Stephanus entitled the treatise *Διαλέξεις* (*Discourses*).

⁵ According to Robinson (1979: 41), ‘the Δ. Λ. was written some time around 403–395 (the date accepted by most scholars)’. The only scholar who dates the work earlier (about 450 BC) is Mazzarino (1966: vol. 1, 286). For extensive discussion of the date of the *Dissoi Logoi* cf. Robinson 1979: 25–41.

⁶ Cf. Burnyeat 1998 and Conley (1985: 62), who is inclined to conjecture that ‘on the basis of its style and content... the *Dissoi Logoi* was composed as a school exercise much later, perhaps even in a late Byzantine school setting’. More recently, Scholz (2003: 204) has defended the standard dating.

⁷ For a description of that milieu in relation to the composition of the *Dissoi Logoi* cf. Scholz 2003.

⁸ Probably Burnyeat 1998 would consider this suggestion largely speculative: ‘Sober readers will suspend judgment on *every* question about the work’ (italics mine).

⁹ Of course this diagnosis depends on my whole reconstruction and assessment of ancient self-refutation, and cannot be vindicated at this stage.

¹⁰ The *Dissoi Logoi* are written in a western Doric dialect with an admixture of several Atticisms and Ionicisms.

¹¹ For this kind of idiom, attributed to Heraclitus, cf. Arist. *Top.* 8.5, 159b30–3.

¹² As Robinson (1979: 194) explains, this ‘disconcerting example of a change from plural to singular is not a *hapax* in the *Dissoi Logoi*’.

¹³ αἱ γὰρ τις ἐρωτάσαι τὼς λέγοντας, ὥς ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος εἴη ψεύστας καὶ ἀλαθής, ὃν αὐτοὶ λέγοντι, πότερός ἐστιν· αἱ μὲν ψεύστας, δᾶλον ὅτι δύο εἴη· αἱ δ’ ἀλαθής ἀποκρίναιτο, καὶ ψεύστας ὁ αὐτὸς οὗτος.

(unqualifiedly) *both* false *and* true', clearly equivalent to the conjunction of the contraries 'Every λόγος is true' and 'Every λόγος is false':

$$(IT) (\forall p)(Tp \wedge Fp)^{14}$$

But the original thesis argued for in the first part of chapter 4 of the *Dissoi Logoi* had a quite different shape, at least if we judge by the battery of arguments collected in its support: the true and false λόγος are the same because

- (1) the same λόγος can be true, if the event it describes has taken place, or false, if that event has not taken place (4.2–3);
- (2) the same λόγος can be true, if uttered by a certain person, and false, if uttered by another (4.4);
- (3) the same λόγος can be true now, and false at a later time (4.5).¹⁵

Burnyeat's general qualm that in the *Dissoi Logoi* 'many of the arguments for and against do not even manage to contradict each other' fits our case nicely: the argument in τ_1 seems liable to the charge of *ignoratio elenchi*, since the thesis it attacks, that any λόγος is both true and false (*simpliciter*) is not the same as the one established by the previous set of arguments (that the same λόγος¹⁶ can turn out to be true or false depending on different circumstances). To be more precise, τ_1 's argument does not manage to contradict any thesis which the previous set of arguments succeeded in establishing: from the opposite perspective, one could hypothesise that

¹⁴ One could also formalise 'the same λόγος is false and true' as $(\forall p)(Tp \leftrightarrow Fp)$ ('every λόγος is false if and only if it is true'). This would leave the possibility open that a λόγος is neither false nor true, but nothing in our text suggests that the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* envisaged the possibility of truth-value gaps. Elsewhere, theses having the structure 'The same thing is F and not-F' are better formalised as $(\forall x)(Fx \leftrightarrow \neg Fx)$, whenever the context makes it clear that it is possible that something is neither F nor not-F (cf. e.g. Pl. *Euthphr.* 7e–8c).

¹⁵ For the same pattern cf. e.g. chapter 1 of the *Dissoi Logoi*:

- (1) Illness is bad for the sick, good for the doctors; victory is good for the winner, bad for the loser; etc.;
- (2) <therefore the same thing (e.g. illness, victory) is good and bad>;
- (3) therefore the good and the bad are the same thing.

The inference from (2) to (3) would sound less problematic to Greek ears than to ours because of the linguistic fact that in Greek 'the F', where F is a neuter singular adjective, can function not only as an abstract (F-ness) but also as a collective (the Fs, the class of the things which are F), much as in the English phrase 'the poor': τὸ ἀγαθόν can therefore be taken to mean both 'goodness' and 'the things which are good'. For a very different and much more celebrated conclusion from premisses of the same kind as (1) cf. Pl. *Resp.* v, 479a–d.

¹⁶ It is difficult to decide whether 'the same λόγος' is best understood as a single sentence-token (as suggested by the argument of sections 2–3) or as a different token of the same sentence-type (as required by the argument of section 4); the argument of section 5 seems compatible with both options. For in-depth discussion of this issue in different terms (linguistic tokens vs. incorporeal propositions) cf. Bailey 2008.

those arguments were aimed at proving, unsuccessfully, the outlandish thesis τ_1 which τ_1 targets.

Two fundamental features of τ_1 's argument immediately stand out: its *dilemmatic* form and its *dialectical* context. Neither feature was to be found in Mackie's formal self-refutation arguments, but we shall encounter both of them repeatedly in our ancient sources: I shall argue that the presence of some kind of dialectical context, in particular, seems to underlie the vast majority of ancient self-refutation arguments, with few exceptions. For this reason it will not be superfluous to try to offer at the outset some preliminary clarification of the fairly broad scope with which I shall use this expression. Hereafter by 'dialectical context' I shall intend, loosely, any situation in which two opposing parties – either individuals or groups, not necessarily facing each other in the flesh – advance and support contradictory views and agree to try to settle their dispute through arguments (typically structured in the form of question and answer) responding to some shared rational standards or rules. Despite their 'agonistic' nature, the ostensible purpose of these exchanges is to establish the truth, or at least the relative merits and plausibility, of the clashing positions, and not of winning the debate at any cost, unlike the case of 'eristics'. On some occasions we shall find a full-blown dialectical exchange along the lines just illustrated; on others the skeleton of such a possible exchange will be only hinted at; on yet other occasions the 'dialectical' nature of the argument will be much less marked, and will simply amount to the fact that self-refutation is the unwelcome consequence which individuals incur in virtue of trying to subscribe to certain theses and put them forward in the public domain or *in foro interno*. In all these cases, self-refutation is something different from a logical property of propositions considered *in vacuo*. My emphasis that ancient self-refutation arguments were typically set in some kind of dialectical context (broadly intended) should come as no surprise: it is a well-recognised fact that ancient logic, even at its most formal, never lost its original connection with the concrete practice of dialogue and disputation. Nevertheless, I shall argue that some confusion has arisen in the literature from disregard for, or at least underestimation of, the full import of this datum.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves, and let us reconstruct instead the details of τ_1 's dialectical exchange. The supporter of τ_1 is faced by his opponent with a dilemma: does he believe that the λόγος expressing τ_1 is false or that it is true? The reasoning underlying the first horn of the dilemma is easy to understand: if the proponent of τ_1 answers that his λόγος expressing τ_1 is false, then he is conceding the contradictory of his

IT (as long as he endorses the platitude $Fp \rightarrow \neg p$), i.e. that, to borrow the opaque but now familiar jargon of the *Dissoi Logoi*, the false λόγος and the true λόγος are two different things. On the other hand, if the proponent of IT grasps the second horn ('My λόγος is true'), he is thereby confirming that he takes IT to be the case; but if he accepts, in accordance with IT, that every λόγος is true *and false*, he must thereby admit that the λόγος expressing his own thesis IT is (also) false too.¹⁷ Here the argument suddenly comes to an end, with no further comment or clarification: but what has it achieved, exactly? On both horns of his opponent's dilemma, the supporter of IT has been forced into undesirable positions: in the first case he has volunteered the straightforward admission that the thesis he was supposed to defend is false; in the second he can be easily forced to concede that the λόγος expressing IT must itself be (also) false, by self-application (and thus, eventually, to deny his own thesis). It is not difficult to see why both outcomes can be interpreted as ruinous dialectical defeats,¹⁸ which anyone should be extremely careful to prevent, by refraining, at the outset, from betting on such a losing horse as IT itself.

Granted, IT has turned out to be indefensible in debate; does this mean that what IT expresses – its propositional content, we might say – has been proved not to be the case? I suggest that the answer is 'no', and, what is more important, that the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* shows no interest in establishing the latter, different point. Unlike Mackie's absolute self-refutation, which is supposed to prove the necessary falsehood of certain propositions (or the impossibility of certain states of affairs obtaining), the argument of TI 'simply' aims at showing the untenability of IT as soon as it

is posed under scrutiny.¹⁹ Moreover, even if we abstract from the dialectical setting of TI, the logic of the charge embedded in the second horn of the dilemma remains significantly different from that of Mackie's argument: if the λόγος 'every λόγος is false (and true)' is true, then every λόγος is false (and true), and therefore the λόγος 'every λόγος is false (and true)' must itself be (also) false. This kind of *self-application* is what one would expect to find as a prominent trait of self-refutation arguments, and we shall discover that this natural expectation is met by various ancient instances. Mackie followed, instead, a different (and indeed the opposite) route: the key step of his absolute self-refutation was not 'If nothing is true, then "Nothing is true" is not true either', but 'If nothing is true, then "Nothing is true" is true' (cf. p. 21).

My reconstruction of the logic of TI could be challenged by observing that the text does not make it explicitly clear that the consequents of the two conditionals involved in the dilemma describe what must be *granted* by anyone who has subscribed to the corresponding antecedents: my suggestion that the argument must be read as a dialectical 'silencer' of the proponent of IT would thus be based on a questionable expansion of the text. TI does not say that if the supporter of IT answers 'false' to his opponent's dilemma, he must admit the contradictory of IT, but only that the contradictory of IT will be the case; nor does it say that should the proponent of IT answer 'true', then he would be forced into admitting that his own λόγος is (also) false, but simply that the λόγος would be (also) false. This might encourage a different reconstruction of our argument, not as a dialectical dilemma, but as a proof by cases of not-IT:

(1)	$T(IT) \vee F(IT)$	Bivalence
(2)	$F(IT) \rightarrow \neg IT$	Semantic descent ($Fp \rightarrow \neg p$)
<3>	$T(IT) \rightarrow IT$	Semantic descent ($Tp \rightarrow p$)
<4>	$IT \rightarrow (T(IT) \wedge F(IT))$	By substitution (self-application of IT)
<5>	$(T(IT) \wedge F(IT)) \rightarrow F(IT)$	\wedge -elimination
(6)	$T(IT) \rightarrow F(IT)$	From <3>, <4> and <5>, by transitivity
<7>	$T(IT) \rightarrow \neg IT$	From (6) and <2>, by transitivity
<8>	$\neg IT$	From <7>, (2) and (1), by simple constructive dilemma
		$((p \rightarrow q) \wedge (r \rightarrow q) \wedge (p \vee r)) \rightarrow q$

¹⁷ Bailey (2008: 251) punctuates the text differently, reading the second horn of the dilemma with the sentence which follows it: 'But if the person replied "this same one is true and false", and if he has ever said or sworn anything true, it follows that the same things are false too.' On this reading the supporter of IT would choose to answer from the very beginning that his λόγος is both true and false, rather than be forced into admitting its falsehood, and this would diminish the effect of the self-refutation argument. It is also difficult to see how the fact that everything he has said or sworn truly would also turn out to be false should follow from this description of IT as both true and false (as required by Bailey's reading), rather than IT itself.

¹⁸ I use 'can' because a full-blown supporter of IT could be prepared to subscribe to the idea that his own λόγος is itself, like every other λόγος, both false and true (the conscious endorsement of this kind of reflexive position would not be unique in ancient thought: cf. e.g. part III, chapter 15). It is clear, however, that the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* is not taking into account the possibility that one could be ready to embrace this hardcore position. In any case, such a position would still be objectionable on dialectical grounds: why has the supporter of IT advanced his thesis, if he believes that IT is the case no more than it is not? Why has he answered 'true' to the dilemma, when he believes that his λόγος is equally true and false, instead of immediately asking his opponent to reformulate the question more properly, as a trilemma? (On the basis of the letter of the Greek text, I am assuming that both horns are explicit: 'Is your λόγος true or false?', and not 'Is your λόγος true (or not)?' – the latter formulation would have been standard in more formally structured dialectical contests.)

¹⁹ Robinson's (1979: 193–4) analogy between IT and the Liar is therefore ungrounded. Levi's suggestion that TI's argument resembles the περιτροπή of S.E. M 8.389–90 (cf. T23 in section 1 of chapter 6) is more to the point, but his assumption that therefore it 'also derives from Democritus' (1940: 298) appears wholly speculative.

The temptation to read τ_1 along these lines must be resisted, for at least two compelling reasons. On the one hand, this reconstruction forces us to supplement the argument with a number of additional steps of which no trace can be found in the text (in particular, the crucial <7> and the conclusion <8>); on the other, the two key premisses (2) and (6) patently distort the literal sense of τ_1 . Notice that the protases of the two conditional sentences are, respectively, 'If <they answer that their λόγος is> "false" . . .'²⁰ and 'If they answer <that their λόγος is> "true" . . .', and not 'If their λόγος is false . . .' and 'If their λόγος is true . . .' This strongly invites us to interpret the apodoses accordingly, since the conditional 'If they answer that their λόγος is "false", then it is clear that <the false λόγος and the true λόγος> would be two things', if taken verbatim, is a sheer *non sequitur*: obviously it is not sufficient to say that p is false for p not to be the case (the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the second conditional sentence). The easiest and most plausible way of making any sense of these conditionals, as charity suggests, is to interpret their apodoses as elliptical, in the way I have proposed above when first reconstructing the argument: 'If <they answer that their λόγος is> "false", then it is clear that <they are conceding that the false λόγος and the true λόγος> are two things' and 'if they answer <that their λόγος is> "true", then <they must admit that this very λόγος> is (also) false'.²¹

We have just come across another trait which will characterise several ancient self-refutation arguments: a tendency to *elliptical* formulations, in which it is not always immediately transparent whether what is being discussed are the truth-values and logical consequences of certain propositions or, rather, the tenability and unavoidable commitments of certain positions in dialectical exchanges.

²⁰ Given the structure of the sentence, some verb such as ἀποκρίναιτο is clearly presupposed in the first conditional.

²¹ *Contra* e.g. Levi 1940: 298. Something analogous to my construal seems to be presupposed by Becker and Scholz (2004: 97–8), who speak of 'pragmatisches Argument'.

CHAPTER 4

Self-refutation and dialectic: Plato

Although in the second part of *Dissoi Logoi* 4 the position under attack (τ_1) had morphed into a conjunction of both the theses we are interested in ('Every λόγος is true and every λόγος is false'), the self-refutation charge embedded in the second horn of τ_1 's dilemma exploited the self-applicability of the second conjunct only, while the first one remained, as it were, logically inert. I shall examine now two Platonic passages in which self-refutation charges are levelled against variants of τ_1 's first conjunct.

In chapter 3 I have emphasised the substantial differences which exist between Mackie's absolute self-refutation argument against 'Nothing is true' and the *Dissoi Logoi* dilemma against τ_1 : no similar comparison will be possible in this chapter, since in his formal taxonomy Mackie left no place for 'Everything is true', 'Nothing is false' and cognate theses. Clearly he did not perceive such theses as self-refuting at all: as we shall discover, their refutation requires in fact explicit consideration of some external conflicting proposition which we would be forced to accept in debate either in virtue of the supposed truth of those theses (section 4.2) or because of some broader kind of 'dialectical necessity' (section 4.1).¹

If this reference to dialectic should strike the reader as little more than a trite commonplace in a Platonic context, consider the following view:

Plato conceived of thoughts as an interior dialogue, not as an interior monologue (*Sophist* 264a). Members of his school, the Academy, trained their private faculties in public dialogues, for which various rules were laid down. The rules made up the art of 'dialectic' (Aristotle sets them out in the *Topics*); and this art had a permanent influence on the terminology of later Greek logic . . . Nonetheless, the dialogue form is *extrinsic* in this sense: Plato's arguments can *all* be turned into monologues

¹ I have argued in chapter 2 against Mackie's pretension that in his absolute self-refutation it is a single proposition, all alone, that refutes (i.e. falsifies) itself. It is true, however, that the fundamental extra assumption required (T-prefixability) is at least supposed to describe a basic, non-contingent trait of the grammar of a predicate ('true') included in the allegedly self-refuting proposition.

without any logical or philosophical loss. The ancient commentators were aware of this, and they frequently bared Plato's arguments of their conversational *clothing* in order to reveal their logical force. (Barnes 2003: 27–8, italics mine)

The thesis which I shall defend in this chapter is precisely the contradictory (although not the contrary) of Barnes's provocative contention: there are *some* Platonic arguments that cannot be bared of their 'conversational clothing' without ruinous logical or philosophical losses. More generally, one focus of my whole discussion in this book will be to demonstrate that, at least as far as ancient self-refutation arguments are concerned, it is typically incorrect to maintain that we can strip them of their original dialectical garb and translate them into a more precise and sober 'monological' form without thereby also misrepresenting and misunderstanding them (we have already examined how this move would fail at the end of the previous chapter on the *Dissoi Logoi* argument $\tau\iota$).² My point is not the trivial one that some valuable *details* would be lost in translation: by reducing those ancient arguments to non-dialectical form – we shall see shortly what kind of logical form has been usually favoured – we misrepresent their *logic* and their *conclusions*. Actually it is not only the ancient commentators who thought they could always bare arguments originally formulated in dialogical or at least dialectical contexts of their original 'clothing';³ this idea has been (and clearly still is, if we judge by Barnes's contention) very much alive in the modern literature (especially, but not exclusively, in those pieces which are more analytically minded and more attentive to the ancient history of 'logic').

4.1 DIONYSODORUS' DOWNFALL (EUTHD. 286C–288A)

Let us begin with a passage from the *Euthydemus*. The sophist Dionysodorus has just argued for the conclusion that contradicting someone else is impossible, silencing his stunned interlocutor Ctesippus (285d–286b).⁴ Socrates takes over the conversation:

τ_2 Even though I have heard this particular λόγος [*sc.* that it is impossible to contradict (οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν)] from many and at many times, I'm always

² Barnes's point concerns explicitly all Platonic arguments, and not all ancient arguments, but the broader context of his remarks (an introduction to 'Argument in Ancient Philosophy') and obvious *a fortiori* considerations should make my extension warranted.

³ I shall discuss an instructive example of this tendency in part II, chapter 11.

⁴ Dionysodorus' argument need not concern us here. For an interpretation of it and analysis of a number of parallel Platonic passages concerning the impossibility of falsehood cf. Denyer 1991, Burnyeat 2002.

amazed (ἄει θαυμάζω). Protagoras and those like him made considerable use of it, and also some still earlier: but it always seems to me that it's something amazing, and that it overturns not just the other λόγοι, but itself as well (ἐμοὶ δὲ ἄει θαυμαστός τις δοκεῖ εἶναι καὶ τοὺς τε ἄλλους ἀνατρέπων καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτόν). But I think I will learn the truth about it from you in the best possible way. The λόγος amounts to claiming that it is not possible to speak falsely (ψευδῇ λέγειν οὐκ ἔστιν), doesn't it? And when speaking either one says something true or else doesn't say anything at all?⁵ (286c1–8)

Socrates' perplexed reaction in τ_2 includes:

- (1) a historical annotation: the notorious οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν thesis, which we know to have been an Antisthenic warhorse,⁶ is attributed to Protagoras, 'those like him' and 'some still earlier';
- (2) a logical indictment ('it overturns . . . itself'), which sounds like a self-refutation charge;
- (3) a broader philosophical point: οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν is equivalent to, or at least entails (δύναται) that, 'it is impossible to speak falsely'.

Although the other points would deserve closer scrutiny too, the second one is obviously the most fascinating for us here: why on earth does Socrates believe that the λόγος that it is impossible to contradict has the amazing peculiarity⁷ of refuting itself? This is surprising:⁸ after all, it proclaims that nothing can be refuted, since, as Socrates explains, it entails the impossibility of speaking falsely.⁹ To try to answer this question, let us see how the dialogue unfolds in the following few pages.

From Dionysodorus' admission of (3), Socrates immediately infers that, according to the Protagorean λόγος, false judging (δοξάζειν), false judgement (δόξα), ignorance (ἀμαθία) and ignorant people (ἀμαθεῖς) will not exist either, thus obtaining Dionysodorus' smug assent on all counts (286d). Socrates protests that Dionysodorus must be speaking only for the sake of argument, but Dionysodorus' riposte is dry: 'Refute (ἐλεγξον) me, then' (286e1). Socrates complains that there cannot be such a thing as refutation

⁵ τοῦτόν γε τὸν λόγον πολλῶν δὴ καὶ πολλᾶκις ἀκηκοῶς ἄει θαυμάζω – καὶ γὰρ οἱ ἀμφὶ Πρωταγόραν σφόδρα ἐχρῶντο αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ ἐτι παλαιότεροι: ἐμοὶ δὲ ἄει θαυμαστός τις δοκεῖ εἶναι καὶ τοὺς τε ἄλλους ἀνατρέπων καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτόν – οἶμαι δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀλήθειαν παρὰ σοῦ κάλλιστα πύσεσθαι. ἄλλο τι ψευδῇ λέγειν οὐκ ἔστιν; τοῦτο γὰρ δύναται ὁ λόγος: ἢ γάρ; ἀλλ' ἢ λέγοντ' ἀληθῆ λέγειν ἢ μὴ λέγειν;

⁶ Cf. e.g. Arist. *Metaph.* Δ 29, 1024b32–4, *Top.* I.11, 104b20–1 and D.L. 3.35 (p. 37n20). Notice the air of paradox surrounding the attribution to Protagoras, the renowned author of *Ἀντιλογίαι* (*Contradicting Arguments*), of the view that ἀντιλέγειν is impossible.

⁷ I interpret the first καὶ of 286c4 as epexegetic.

⁸ Pace Rankin, according to whom this is 'a semantically self-evident point' (1981: 25).

⁹ Another notorious thesis previously defended by the two brothers Dionysodorus and Euthydemus (283e–284c).

if one accepts, with Dionysodorus, that nobody speaks falsely (286e2–3) and it is impossible to contradict. The underlying charge is clear: what Dionysodorus has just *done* (challenging Socrates to refute him) is inconsistent with what he *says*, since by implying that refutation is possible it seems to commit him to the idea that falsehood and contradiction are also possible after all (a form of pragmatic inconsistency: what Dionysodorus does clashes with what he says).

Euthydemus comes to the rescue of his companion, helping him to avoid tackling Socrates' criticism by picking up and embracing Socrates' own mocking suggestion that since falsehood is indeed impossible, refutation is also impossible, and thus Dionysodorus cannot have challenged Socrates to refute him, despite all appearances (286e4–7): since no one is capable of doing what is not (cf. 284c), you simply cannot order someone to do what is not.¹⁰ Socrates does not lose his patience, and launches a second attack: if ignorance does not exist, 'if none of us makes mistakes either in action or in speech or in thought – if this is really the case – what in heaven's name do you two come here to teach?' (287a1–b1). The sophists' previous boast to be excellent teachers (cf. e.g. 273d–274a) is inconsistent with the οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν thesis they are now defending, and all its corollaries: teaching certainly involves, among other things, *contradicting* and purging the *false beliefs* of the learner and replacing them with true beliefs, elevating him from error and ignorance to knowledge.¹¹ But again the two sophists refuse to tackle Socrates' specific challenge, accusing him of bringing back into the discussion something said at the very beginning of their exchange (their boasts as teachers) only because he is 'unable to deal with what is being said presently' (287b2–5). With this new move on the dialectical chessboard (a refusal to consider diachronic inconsistency a dialectical sin),¹² however, they give Socrates a chance to revive his previous objection: what could the sense of the phrase 'unable to deal with what

is being said presently' be if not 'unable to *refute* (ἐξελέγξει) the present argument' (287b6–c1)? Again Dionysodorus' challenge is meaningless and self-contradictory if – as he says – refutation is impossible.

Once again Dionysodorus refuses to engage with Socrates' question and wants to restore himself to his preferred role of questioner, but Socrates quickly spots another inconsistency in this behaviour: the principle on which Dionysodorus refuses to answer must be that he is the more skilled in discussion and knows, unlike the *ignorant* Socrates, when an answer is to be given and when not (287c9–d2). Dionysodorus does not grasp Socrates' allusion or, perhaps more likely, as his reaction betrays ('You are just blathering . . . ' (287d3)), pretends not to grasp it. His line of defence consists instead in proceeding with his own questioning: if only animate beings have sense (νοοῦντα), and phrases are inanimate, as Socrates admits, why has Socrates asked the sense (νοοῖ) of Dionysodorus' phrase 'unable to deal with what is being said presently' (287d7–e1)? This is yet another piece of sophistry, based on a homonymous use of the verb νοεῖν,¹³ but Socrates, instead of denouncing its fallaciousness, once again brings it to bear against its proponent:

T3 I suppose, for no other reason than that I made a mistake on account of my stupidity. Or perhaps I did not make a mistake but was right even when I spoke as if phrases had sense? Are you saying that I made a mistake or not? Because if I did not make a mistake you will not refute me, no matter how wise you are, and it is you who are unable to deal with the argument. But if I did make a mistake not even then are you right to claim that it is impossible to make mistakes. And I'm not talking about things you said last year. So, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, it looks as if this λόγος has made no progress and still, as in the past, throwing down <the others> falls down itself (καταβαλὼν πίπτειν).¹⁴ (287e2–288a4)

The loop is now complete. Dionysodorus' sophism has provided Socrates with confirmation of his initial suspicion that Dionysodorus' λόγος throws itself down: καταβαλὼν πίπτειν is clearly meant to be equivalent to τοὺς τε ἄλλους ἀνατρέπων καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτόν of T2 (286c4). Both phrases have a

¹⁰ Both Socrates' charge and Euthydemus' defences surprisingly overlook the possibility of interpreting Dionysodorus' imperative not as committing him to the existence of contradiction and falsehood *in propria persona*, but only as challenging Socrates to do, if he is capable, that very thing which he insists is possible and which Dionysodorus denies (compare the following exchange: 'I can make people fly just by wishing it'; 'No, you can't'; 'Yes, I can'; 'Make me fly, then!').

¹¹ Cf. e.g. *Tht.* 161d7–e3.

¹² It is this sort of refusal that can make self-refutation arguments particularly useful on such occasions. One might object that this refusal appears shameless only because of our failure to appreciate the real nature of the eristic display of the two brothers, who are not bound to consistency between different episodes or 'rounds' of dialectic. In Socrates' eyes, however, such a rejoinder would be tantamount to confirmation of his initial suspicion that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus speak only 'for the sake of argument'. For discussion of the possible deep philosophical reasons for the brothers' 'episodic' approach to dialectic cf. McCabe 1994b.

¹³ With the meaning of 'to mean', in one case, and 'to think', in the other. My English translation is not completely faithful to the Greek original, but manages to reproduce the same kind of homonymy (ὁμωνυμία).

¹⁴ τί ἄλλο γε, ἢν δ' ἐγώ, ἡ ἐξήμαρτον διὰ τὴν βλακείαν; ἢ οὐκ ἐξήμαρτον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο ὀρθῶς εἶπον, εἰπὼν ὅτι νοεῖ τὰ ῥήματα; πότῃ φησὶ ἐξαμαρτάνειν με ἢ οὐ; εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἐξήμαρτον, οὐδὲ σὺ ἐξελέγξεις, καίπερ σοφὸς ὢν, οὐδ' ἔχεις ὅτι χρῆ τῷ λόγῳ εἰ δ' ἐξήμαρτον, οὐδ' οὕτως ὀρθῶς λέγεις, φάσκων οὐκ εἶναι ἐξαμαρτάνειν. καὶ ταῦτα οὐ πρὸς ἃ πέρυσιν ἔλεγες λέγω. ἀλλὰ ἔοικεν, ἔφην ἐγώ, ὧ Διονυσόδωρ τε καὶ Εὐθύδημος, οὗτος μὲν ὁ λόγος ἐν ταῦτ' ἔμεινεν καὶ ἐτι ὥσπερ τὸ παλαιὸν καταβαλὼν πίπτειν.

nice pictorial force: the verbs καταβάλλω, πίπτω and ἀνατρέπω were all used in wrestling jargon ('throwing down', 'falling down', 'overturning'),¹⁵ which introduces us to another recurrent trait in ancient self-refutation arguments, the frequent use of metaphors and similes to express and illustrate them.¹⁶ The wrestling metaphor chosen by Socrates is particularly apt here, since the excellence of the two brothers had been described at the very beginning of the dialogue (271c–272b) in terms of their stunning mastery of all forms of *pankration*,¹⁷ both physical (in battle) and verbal (in the courtrooms and in dialectical contests aimed at refuting their opponents).

With a sophistic argument Dionysodorus has mocked Socrates for speaking as if phrases had sense: but what can the point of this criticism be for one who takes Dionysodorus' present stance on contradiction and falsehood? He is faced with a dilemma in T3: if Socrates did not make any mistake by speaking in that way, then Dionysodorus must admit that his censure has been pointless (notice: a dialectical *error*), and he cannot dismiss Socrates' previous inconsistency charges (he still owes him an answer, and thus *he* appears to be 'unable to deal with the argument'); if Socrates did make a

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. *Euthd.* 277d1–2; *Phdr.* 256b; *Resp.* 1x, 583b. For an excellent study of Plato's use of wrestling metaphors (with special focus on the *Theaetetus*) cf. Herrmann 1995. Some translators take ὥσπερ τὸ παλαιόν at 288a4 as referring to some proverbial expression ('as the old saying goes') or to some piece of wrestling jargon ('in the old phrase of the wrestling school', reading τὸ παλαιόν); both proposals seem unwarranted, but given the context a pun could be meant between τὸ παλαιόν and τὸ παλαιόν.

For an early occurrence of the wrestling jargon (καταβάλλω, πτώμα, κατάβλημα) to illustrate self-refutation cf. Democritus' fragment 125 (T116 on p. 309). For a clear use of ἀνατρέπω in this context cf. Aristoph. *Nu.* 899–902:

Κρ. ἀπολώ σε κακῶς.

Ητ. εἰπέ, τί ποῖων;

Κρ. τὰ δίκαια λέγων.

Ητ. ἀλλ' ἀνατρέψω ταῦτ' ἀντιλέγων· οὐδὲ γὰρ εἶναι πάνυ φημί Δίκην.

Strong Argument: The destruction I shall wreak on you will be woeful.

Weak Argument: Tell me, doing what?

Strong Argument: Saying what is just.

Weak Argument: But contradicting this, I will overturn <you>: for I say that Justice does not even exist at all.

Notice also that Protagoras is credited with a Περὶ πάλης (*On Wrestling*; D.L. 9.55) and with being the first to introduce 'argumentative contests' (λόγων ἀγῶνας; D.L. 9.52). For the terminology of Greek combat sports cf. Gardiner 1905, 1906, Poliakoff 1982, Georgiou 2005.

¹⁶ Καταβάζων could be a polemic allusion to Protagoras' work Ἀλήθεια (*Truth*) under its alternative title Οἱ καταβάλλοντες (*The Downthrowers*; cf. S.E. *M* 7.60 and section 4.2 of this chapter), but it is not certain that this title enjoyed early currency. For the use of the verb καταβάλλω as a metaphor for refuting someone in the agonistic context of debate cf. e.g. Hipp. *Nat. Hom.* 1.1 (a nice example of how expressions such as αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοὺς καταβάλλουσιν need not refer, however, to self-refutation in any strict sense); Eurip. *Bacc.* 202; Plut. *Peric.* 8.5, 7; Stob. *Flor.* 2.23.15.

¹⁷ The 'all-out' combat sport introduced in the 648 BC Olympic Games as a blend of boxing and wrestling.

mistake, then perhaps Dionysodorus won the penultimate round of the dialectical fight, but the οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν thesis and all its companion theses are automatically admitted by him to be false, and he loses the whole match. Either way, Dionysodorus is defeated.¹⁸

Socrates' argument in T3 looks like a knock-out blow: but why should we classify it as a self-refutation argument, as Socrates' metaphors suggest? Sprague's (1962: 19) attempted solution is unconvincing: to endorse theses which deny the possibility of refutation, and then go about one's daily business of trying to refute everyone you come across certainly is not a commendable position, but the charge you can level against it is, again, 'only' pragmatic inconsistency (of the sophists), and not self-refutation (of their λόγος).¹⁹

A different hypothesis could better explain Socrates' adoption of the self-refutation jargon here: the arguments purporting to prove that it is impossible to contradict (or, perhaps, this very thesis) contradict (or, more precisely, are meant to contradict) the commonsense view that contradiction is possible, thus committing their proponent to the existence of contradiction, refuting themselves.²⁰ The difficulty with this proposal²¹ is, trivially, that T3's dilemma, which is clearly meant by Socrates to support his final self-refutation charge, does not appear to work along these lines.

I suggest that we should preserve the core of this solution, but link the self-refutation charge directly to the second horn of Socrates' dilemma.

¹⁸ As Chance remarks, Socrates' 'refutation is also a perfect illustration of a perennial feature of all comic action: comic inversion. Just as the comic playwright presents, for example, a robber robbed or a mugger mugged, so too Plato has presented the refuters refuted' (1992: 108).

¹⁹ The notion of 'pragmatic inconsistency' would require some qualification. An inconsistency could arise here

- between what the sophists say (that refutation is impossible) and what they *do* (refuting Socrates), with the latter being an outright counterexample to, and thus falsification of, the former;
- between what the sophists say and further beliefs which need to be presupposed to make sense of what they are *trying to do* (the belief that refutation is possible, which is required if the attempt to refute Socrates is to be rational: you do not try to do what you believe to be impossible). In this case the sophists' attempts to refute Socrates do not falsify the thesis that refutation is impossible, but only unmask the sophists' inconsistency.

For a parallel distinction between two senses of 'pragmatic self-refutation' cf. part II, chapter 10.

²⁰ I believe that the line of reasoning just proposed underlies this extremely compressed passage in Diogenes Laertius (3.35): 'They also say that Antisthenes, being about to read publicly something that he had composed, invited him [*sc.* Plato] to be present. And on his inquiring what he was about to read, Antisthenes replied that it was "On the impossibility of contradicting." "How then", said Plato, "can you write on this subject?", thus teaching that it incurs reversal (περιτρέπεται)' (λέγεται δ' ὅτι καὶ Ἀντισθένης μέλλον ἀναγινώσκειν τι τῶν γεγραμμένων αὐτῷ παρεκάλεσεν αὐτὸν παρατυχεῖν. καὶ πυθόμενῳ τί μέλλει ἀναγινώσκειν, εἶπεν ὅτι περὶ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι ἀντιλέγειν· τοῦ δ' εἰπόντος· πῶς οὖν σὺ περὶ αὐτοῦ τούτου γράφεις; καὶ διδάσκοντος ὅτι περιτρέπεται). On the meaning and use of περιτρέπεται cf. chapter 6.

²¹ Discarded by Sprague (1962: 19) and accepted by Hawtrey (1981: 108).

To do so we need to understand the term λόγος as referring here not only to the proposition that contradiction is impossible, but also to all the arguments advanced in its support, both to establish it and to undermine potential counterarguments (the whole *theory*, we might gloss).²² By grasping the second horn of Socrates' dilemma in T₃ and thus confirming his allegation that Socrates was mistaken in speaking as if phrases had sense, Dionysodorus would be defending the thesis he is supporting in the current dialectical exchange, by defusing Socrates' accusation of inconsistency at 287b6–c1; but by overturning (or at least by trying to overturn, sophistically)²³ that accusation, he would at the same time overturn his thesis too, by unwittingly conceding that mistake and contradiction do exist after all.

One could still feel uncomfortable with the idea that in this way Dionysodorus makes himself liable to the charge of self-refutation, rather than to a second, renewed charge of inconsistency: strictly speaking, it is not the οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν thesis, *qua proposition* taken in isolation or together with some other assumption, that overthrows itself here, but *Dionysodorus* who contradicts himself by counterarguing in its defence. However, Dionysodorus' sophism against Socrates, which is inconsistent with his endorsement and defence of that thesis, is not just an unrelated argument; it stems from that endorsement by a sort of *dialectical necessity*, and in this sense can be considered part of it.²⁴ In a dialectical context like the one depicted in the *Euthydemus* you ought to try to refute the arguments that your opponent advances against the position you are advocating, unless you prefer to give it up and admit defeat: but if your position is that 'it is impossible to contradict' then any such attempt (whatever its precise content and force) will speak against the position of which it is part, rather than support it, and will transform you into the best, albeit reluctant, ally of your opponent. Although initially, in T₂, Socrates could not possibly have foreseen to which specific argument of Dionysodorus he would later apply the fatal dilemma of T₃, he could be fully confident,

²² For the same idea in a different context cf. Burnyeat 1976a: 53–4 and p. 174 below.

²³ I suggest that neither ἀνατρέπω nor καταβάλλω in Socrates' two formulations of the self-refutation charge should be intended as 'success verbs': Socrates cannot be saying that the arguments in favour of οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν do manage to overturn the opposite thesis and the arguments in its defence (and then overturn themselves too), but only that they *purport* to overturn them (with ἀνατρέπω and καταβάλλω used with a conative nuance), with the unfortunate result of overturning themselves only. For the use of ἀνατρέπω and ἐκβάλλω as success verbs in a self-refutation context cf. instead part III, chapter 14, section 3.

²⁴ McCabe (1998: 155) notices that 'the claim that falsehood is impossible does not *directly* imply its own falsehood . . . it needs, instead, a more complex dialectical context to be overthrown', but she does not clarify what this context is in our passage.

from the very beginning, that the sophist, when challenged, in order to defend his λόγος would have to attempt some refutation of him to which the dilemma could be applied. Socrates' ironic remark 'I am not talking of things you said last year' can be interpreted not only 'chronologically' (he is applying his dilemma to the argument Dionysodorus has just proposed) but also logically (that argument is an integral part of the current 'dialectical round', unlike the two sophists' previous boast as teachers).

Socrates has illustrated in action why οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν is bound to be a *dialectical loser*: any attempt to defend it will amount to an involuntary admission of its falsehood. The λόγος is in fact incompatible with dialectic (just as it is incompatible with teaching), because by denying the possibility of falsehood and error it destroys the rationale of debating (proving your own position correct and your adversary's wrong). The only manoeuvre the thesis affords is the very undialectical behaviour of stating it and then remaining silent. And this too only with the crucial proviso that yours is no ordinary assertion: without such a proviso, the bare statement of it could already incur the charge of self-refutation, since normally by asserting that *p* you would be taken to be committing yourself to the idea that *p* is true and not-*p* is thereby false.

Needless to say, this is a most unpalatable result for any philosophical position: to be a position that cannot be defended.²⁵ But has the *proposition* itself 'It is impossible to contradict' thereby been proved to be *false*? In other words, has Socrates produced an argument for us to accept the conclusion that falsehood and contradiction do exist? I suggest that the correct answer seems to be, again, 'no'. The fact that Dionysodorus could not help committing himself to the existence of error and contradiction as soon as he decided to enter the public dialectical arena which is built on and functions around those notions does not imply, 'in point of logic', that error and contradiction really exist.²⁶ Granted, the sophist's downfall was not the result of any preventable 'strategic' error on his part, but reflected an objective indefensibility of his thesis in that setting²⁷ (only in this sense, then, the specific dialectical context is not fundamental for the argument to work, whereas a dialectical context certainly is). One could still

²⁵ In part II, chapter 13, we shall encounter self-refuting positions that cannot even be coherently *occupied* in the first place.

²⁶ Just as the mere fact that one says that IT is false does not prove that the false λόγος and the true λόγος are different (cf. chapter 3).

²⁷ In Socrates' own terms, an old defect that no one has ever found a way to overcome. Notice that in T₃ Socrates seems to leave the theoretical possibility open that the οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν thesis could make some 'progress' in the future, i.e. that some non-self-refuting way of proposing and defending it could be devised (cf. pp. 216–18).

protest, however, that that arena hosts futile games, built on presuppositions and governed by rules which do not hold 'out there'. In other words, one could insist that contradiction and falsehood do not exist (e.g. because so-called falsehoods are actually failures to say anything significant, and so-called contradictions actually fail to hinge on the same object),²⁸ although we foolishly behave and speak as if they were. The intelligibility itself of such a rejoinder could be disputed (for one, would those who engage in this sterile game not be *mistaken*, after all?); however, this would require further discussion and clarification of the notions of truth, falsehood, error and contradiction themselves, which clearly goes beyond anything delivered by the self-refutation manoeuvre itself.

I am not suggesting that Plato believed that the existence of contradiction and falsehood could not be argued for and positively established on the basis of reasons independent of the dialectical context, but only that his purpose in the *Euthydemus* section we have just analysed was more 'modest': dramatising the dialectical weakness of a certain thesis and its supporters. Whether he thought that dialectical indefensibility was a telling sign of something more fundamental about the truth-value of the proposition involved is a different question which must remain open at this stage.²⁹ This crucial point, which concerns the intrinsic nature and logic of Plato's self-refutation argument, is all too easily missed if we cheerfully strip this passage of its complex 'dialogical clothing', as Barnes suggests we can, and indeed should, and try to distil from it some different non-dialectical argument, for example along the following lines:

If it is true that there is no false judgement, but Socrates thinks it is false, then it is false that there is no false judgement. (Burnyeat 2002: 41)

This kind of simplification has certainly been inspired by the fact that it would appear to make our *Euthydemus* argument very similar to the celebrated anti-Protagorean self-refutation argument in the *Theaetetus*.³⁰ The next section will be devoted to the analysis of that argument.

4.2 PROTAGORAS REFUTED (THT. 170A–171D)

Over the last four decades or so very few Platonic dialogues have attracted the same amount of scholarly interest as the *Theaetetus*; no single passage in

²⁸ Cf. Denyer 1991 for a number of ancient arguments along these lines.

²⁹ For a possible answer cf. part II, chapter 13, section 4.

³⁰ For this approach and comparison cf. e.g. Nancy 1989: 80, Fine 1998a: 201n2 and Kahn 2000: 91.

the *Theaetetus* has managed to excite the same lively debate as Socrates' so-called 'most clever' refutation of Protagoras' 'Measure Doctrine' (hereafter, MD) at 171a–c. None the less, we are still far from reaching consensus on the logic and worth of that argument. Since MD, however one interprets it, is a close relative of our thesis 'Everything is true', and Socrates' argument is often treated as a paradigmatic ancient example of self-refutation,³¹ I shall dare to dissect, once again, the complex body of that argument.³²

4.2.1 MD and the context of Socrates' self-refutation argument

Immediately after Theaetetus' formulation of his first admissible definition of knowledge, 'Knowledge is perception' (ἐπιστήμη ἢ αἴσθησις) (hereafter, KP), Socrates remarks that Protagoras used to say the same, although in a different way:

T4 Man is the measure (μέτρον) of all things, of those which are, that they are, of those which are not, that they are not.³³ (152a2–4)

Protagoras' MD is paraphrased, in turn, as follows:

T5 As each thing appears (φαίνεται) to me, so it is for me (ἐμοί), as it appears to you, so it is for you (σοί).³⁴ (152a6–8)

Since 'appears' and 'is perceived' amount to the same in the case of perceptual objects (152c1–2), MD implies that 'things are for each person (ἐκάστῳ) such as he perceives (αἰσθάνεται) them' (152c2–3) and thus that perception (αἴσθησις) 'is always of what is, and cannot be false, as befits knowledge' (152c5–6). Therefore, Protagoras' MD provides supporting ground for Theaetetus' KP (being a sufficient condition for its truth): in a world in which a Protagorean epistemology holds good, perception is always of what is the case (and thus always true) for the perceiver. In a case in which, 'when the same wind is blowing, one of us feels cold, and the other not' (152b2–3), we must say that the wind 'is cold for the one who feels cold, and not for the other' (152b6–8). This move allows Protagoras to insist that neither perception is false and, at the same time, to avoid accepting the

³¹ Some variants: 'recoil argument' (Newman 1982), 'table-turning argument' (Ketchum 1992), 'peritrope argument' (e.g. Lee 1973, Burnyeat 1976b, Chappell 2006).

³² This section is an abridged and revised version of Castagnoli 2004a, to which I refer the reader for all the details which I could not discuss here, and especially for analysis of the broader context of the self-refutation argument and of a number of alternative interpretations.

³³ φησὶ γὰρ πού πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἀνθρώπων εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὥς ἐστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὥς οὐκ ἐστιν.

³⁴ οἷα μὲν ἕκαστα ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τοιαῦτα μὲν ἐστὶν ἐμοί, οἷα δὲ σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ αὐτοὶ σοί.

contradiction 'The wind is both cold and not cold' (thus preserving, we would say, the Principle of Non-Contradiction – hereafter, PNC). But what on earth can 'The wind is cold for Socrates' mean? This is explained when Socrates introduces, and progressively unfolds in more and more detail, the 'secret truth' which Protagoras allegedly revealed to his pupils (152c10): this 'Secret Doctrine' (hereafter, SD) is meant to provide an ontological setting for the epistemological MD. SD is first introduced as the thesis that 'nothing is just one thing in itself'³⁵ (152d2–3), to become very soon the quite different thesis that 'nothing is one, either any thing or qualified in any way whatsoever'³⁶ (152d6):

τ6 All the things which we incorrectly say to be (εἶναι) are in the process of coming to be (γίγνεται), as the result of movement and change and blending with one another.³⁷ (152d7–e1)

After a preliminary sketch of a SD-based theory of perception (153d7–154a5), SD appears in the new form 'everything is change (κίνησις) and there is nothing else besides this'³⁸ (156a5). A long description of what the world is like according to this theory follows (156a5–157b1), which shows how SD provides an ontological backing for Protagoras' MD and Theaetetus' KR: since each perception (αἴσθησις) and the matching perceived thing (αἰσθητόν), i.e. quality,³⁹ come into being together only on the occasion of the interaction of their two 'parents' (the perceiver and the perceived object),⁴⁰ they are relative to both parents. Each perception is of a perceived object no less than it is of (belongs to) a perceiver; more surprisingly, each perceived quality is *for a perceiver* no less than it is (a quality) of a perceived object. There cannot be any perception to which no perceived quality corresponds (every perception is true: perception is infallible), and there cannot be any unperceived quality 'out there' (every perceptual quality is perceived: perception is 'omniscient'). Αἰσθητόν and αἴσθησις are like twins (δίδυμοι), and this ensures that perception is unerring, 'as befits knowledge'.⁴¹

Now we can understand the meaning of the relativiser in 'The wind is cold for Socrates'. Socrates and the wind, two parents, generate in their

³⁵ ἔν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ οὐδὲν ἐστίν.

³⁶ μηδενὸς ὄντος ἑνὸς μήτε τινὸς μήτε ὁποιοῦν.

³⁷ ἐκ δὲ δὴ φορᾶς τε καὶ κινήσεως καὶ κράσεως πρὸς ἀλλήλα γίγνεται πάντα ἃ δὴ φαμεν εἶναι, οὐκ ὁρθῶς προσαγορεύοντες.

³⁸ τὸ πᾶν κίνησις ἦν καὶ ἄλλο παρὰ τοῦτο οὐδέν.

³⁹ The noun ποιότης ('quality') will be coined by Plato at 182a9–b1 (cf. also D.L. 3.24).

⁴⁰ According to SD, the parents themselves are 'slow changes', and thus not objects in the ordinary sense of the word 'object', while the twins are 'quick motions' (156c7–d3).

⁴¹ They must be *identical* twins, then.

encounter twin offspring, coldness and a perception of cold, which move in the space between them. Coldness quickly moves towards the wind and qualifies it (relatively to Socrates), so that the wind becomes, for Socrates, cold; the perception of cold quickly moves towards Socrates and qualifies him (relatively to this wind), so that he becomes a feeling-cold Socrates (with respect to this wind). Is the wind warm or cold in some absolute sense? No, nothing is qualified in any way by itself: each thing becomes whatever it is in relation to something.⁴²

At 160e the depiction of Protagoras' MD and SD is complete. After a gradual unfolding of its significance and expansion of its scope, MD, which as we have seen had started out as a form of narrow perceptual relativism, has reached at this point of the dialogue the highest level of generality:

$\forall x \forall y \forall F$ (if y appears F to x , then y is F for x)

where the x s are, of course, men, and the domains of the y s and F s do not have any apparent restriction.⁴³

Socrates presents now a series of objections to this form of global relativism (161c–164b), meeting Theaetetus' approval, but also voices a possible disdainful 'apology' on behalf of the dead Protagoras, who protests that those objections have been unfairly based on mere plausibility and verbal traps, hints at how he would reply to them, and challenges Socrates to attack and refute what he actually says, if he is able to (162d–e, 166a–c).⁴⁴ Socrates can present his objections in a continuous speech, or, if he prefers, use his favoured method of question and answer (δι' ἐρωτήσεων), provided he is fair in his questioning (167d4–e1).⁴⁵ Subsequently, Socrates persuades a reluctant Theodorus to participate, in place of young Theaetetus, in a more mature examination of Protagoras' doctrine, and in particular of the issue whether it was correct on Socrates' part to have Protagoras concede in his apology (166d–167d) that wisdom (σοφία) does exist, but that the wise are superior to others not on the question of what is true or false (everyone

⁴² For excellent analysis of SD cf. Lee 2000, Silverman 2000: 109–31.

⁴³ Cf. Fine's (1994: 213–14) distinction between 'narrow Protagoreanism' and 'broad Protagoreanism'. For detailed analysis of the various stages of the expansion from the former to the latter and for discussion of different interpretations of MD, according to which Protagoras is not a relativist 'about truth', but 'offact' (e.g. Waterlow 1977), or is not a relativist at all, but an 'infallibilist' or 'subjectivist' committed to absolute truths about private perceptual objects (e.g. Fine 1994, 1998a and 1998b) cf. Castagnoli 2004a: 5–9.

⁴⁴ For this rejoinder and its intrinsic difficulties cf. *Euthd.* 286e1–3 and pp. 33–4.

⁴⁵ On Protagoras' own mastery of both modalities of speech cf. e.g. *Pl. Prt.* 329b1–5 and 334e4–335a1.

is an infallible measure of truth), but on that of what is better/beneficial or worse/harmful (169d3–8): the wise are those who can change the appearances, who, when things appear (and therefore are) bad for someone, can produce a better state by making things appear (and therefore be) good for him (167c6–7). Socrates' plan is to obtain Protagoras' agreement (ὁμολογία) on this point in the quickest and safest possible way, 'starting from his own λόγος' (169e8–170a1). The section which follows will not be as quick as we might have expected given such a prelude, but will also secure Protagoras' agreement on a more crucial point than initially envisaged.

4.2.2 Socrates' dilemma

The long section 170a3–171c7 has a complex structure; only a few commentators have offered a comprehensive account of it as a whole, whereas most have focused exclusively on its final and more celebrated part, the 'most clever' argument, or at best on the portion of the text beginning at 170e7. As I think that full understanding of that argument requires a firm grasp of the whole section (which, I shall argue, is more unitary than has been usually realised), let us examine it from beginning to end.

Since Socrates aims at obtaining Protagoras' agreement starting from Protagoras' own λόγος, he begins by recalling it:

- (1) what seems (τὸ δοκοῦν) to each one also is for him.⁴⁶
(170a3–4)

I have explained above the scope that this λόγος (one of the various paraphrases of MD) has reached at this point of the dialogue: 'what seems to each one' is whatever is judged by each man. Given the way in which Socrates has introduced the present discussion, we can expect that MD, and in particular this formulation of it, will be a starting premiss of his argument. Socrates then obtains Theodorus' concession that

- (2) everyone agrees that all men believe in the existence of both wisdom (σοφίαν) and ignorance (ἄμαθίαν). (170b6–7)

As evidence for this universal consensus Socrates does not bring the declarations of people, but their overt behaviour: men look for (or, alternatively, propose themselves as) experts, teachers and leaders, on the evident

⁴⁶ τὸ δοκοῦν ἐκάστῳ τοῦτο καὶ εἶναι φησί που ὃ δοκεῖ;

assumption that experts, teachers and leaders are wise in those very spheres in which laymen are ignorant, and that wisdom is something valuable, sometimes even vital (170a6–b7). Theodorus also grants that

- (3) men believe that wisdom is true thinking, ignorance false judgement (170b9–10)

This ordinary conception of σοφία and ἄμαθία in terms of truth and falsehood is not the one we have seen Socrates attribute to Protagoras in his 'apology': therefore, 'men' should be intended as 'most men' (at this stage, fairness requires that Protagoras and his followers are excluded). It is easy to see how (2) and (3) jointly imply that

- (4) everyone agrees that (most) men believe that there are false judgements

from which, as we shall see shortly, the second premiss of Socrates' argument is easily secured.

Let us now proceed in our analysis:

- τ7 Socr.: What then, Protagoras, are we to make of your λόγος? Are we to say that men always judge what is true, or that they judge sometimes what is true and sometimes what is false? (πότερον ἀληθῆ φῶμεν αἰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δοξάζειν, ἢ τοτὲ μὲν ἀληθῆ, τοτὲ δὲ ψευδῆ;) For, I suppose, from both alternatives it follows that men do not always judge what is true, but both <what is true and what is false>. For consider, Theodorus, whether anyone of Protagoras' followers, or you yourself, would be willing to contend that no one ever thinks that anyone else is ignorant and judges what is false?

Theod.: But this would be incredible, Socrates.

Socr.: And yet it is to this that the λόγος saying that man is the measure of all things necessarily gets.

Theod.: How is that? (πῶς δὴ;) ⁴⁷ (170c2–d3)

Protagoras' λόγος, which we had found in its usual relativised form ('What seems to each one also is *for him*') only a few lines above, in (1), and which occurs again at the end of τ7 in its 'official' Protagorean formulation ('Man

⁴⁷ ΣΩ. Τί οὖν, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, χρησόμεθα τῷ λόγῳ; πότερον ἀληθῆ φῶμεν αἰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δοξάζειν, ἢ τοτὲ μὲν ἀληθῆ, τοτὲ δὲ ψευδῆ; ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων γάρ που συμβαίνει μὴ αἰ ἀληθῆ ἀλλ' ἀμφοτέρω αὐτοὺς δοξάζειν. σκόπει γάρ, ὦ Θεόδωρε, εἰ ἔθελαι ἄν τις τῶν ἀμφοτέρων Πρωταγόραν ἢ σὺ αὐτὸς διαμάχεσθαι ὥς οὐδεὶς ἡγεῖται ἕτερος ἕτερον ἄμαθῆ τε εἶναι καὶ ψευδῆ δοξάζειν.

ΘΕΟ. Ἀλλ' ἄπιστον, ὦ Σώκρατες.

ΣΩ. Καὶ μὴν εἰς τοῦτο γε ἀνάγκη ὁ λόγος ἥκει ὁ πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἀνθρώπων λέγων.

ΘΕΟ. Πῶς δὴ;

is the measure of all things'), appears different at the beginning of the passage (170c3):

- (5) men always judge what is true.⁴⁸

The absence of the qualifier 'for them' is puzzling: it seems to make of (5) an 'infallibilist' or 'subjectivist' thesis, and not that formulation of relativism which we expected. Before considering some possible explanations for this absence, let us see what role (5) plays in Socrates' argument:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| (a) If men's judgements are always true (= (5)), | $p \rightarrow \neg p$ |
| then men's judgements sometimes are false. | |
| (b) If men's judgements sometimes are false, then | $\neg p \rightarrow \neg p$ |
| men's judgements sometimes are false. | |
| (c) Either men's judgements are always true or | $p \vee \neg p$ |
| men's judgements sometimes are false. | |
| <hr/> | |
| (d) Therefore, men's judgements sometimes are | $\neg p$ |
| false. | |

The validity of this constructive dilemma and the truth of premisses (b) and (c) are apparent. Conditional (a), the core of the argument, requires instead some explanation: that men sometimes make false judgements follows from (5) and the further, external premiss, already guaranteed by (4), that people judge that false judgements occur. For if every human judgement is true, then also the judgement according to which there are false judgements must be true, and therefore there must be false judgements. If one wanted to block this line of reasoning and deny that false judgements exist, one should deny what everyone agrees upon, i.e. that people generally believe in the existence of ignorance and false judgement: but, as T7 reminds us, not even Protagoras or the Protagoreans can be ready to reject this undeniable datum.⁴⁹

Socrates' dilemmatic argument, as it stands, is clear, elegant and unimpeachable: however, as a refutation of *Protagoras* it seems to be vitiated by the fact that the unrelativised (5) does not look like a fair depiction of MD. Is Socrates unwittingly guilty of *ignoratio elenchi*? Surely this is to be ruled out, given that the qualifiers are firm in their place both a few lines above and, as

⁴⁸ For the reasons why I believe that (5) is meant to be a formulation of MD and discussion of different interpretations cf. Castagnoli 2004a: 12.

⁴⁹ In any case, by denying what everyone believes, despite acknowledging that people do believe it, Protagoras would at the same time be involuntarily admitting the existence of false beliefs. As Denyer convincingly argues, 'Protagoras wishes to endorse our everyday standards for telling who thinks what' (1991: 89–90).

we shall see, a few lines below T7, and it would be impossible for any lucid writer to commit such a blunder, let alone for a Plato.⁵⁰ Might Socrates be dropping the qualifiers purposely, then, to get an easy win over Protagoras? According to Burnyeat, after Protagoras' apology and his request to be given a fairer treatment in the discussion of his doctrine, 'it would be nothing less than perverse dishonesty were Plato without reason to make Socrates argue in the sequel in a way that depended for its damaging effect on the omission of the relativizing qualifiers', and 'perverse dishonesty is not a charge to be leveled lightly against a philosopher of Plato's stature and integrity' (1976b: 177). I shall argue in due course that this diagnosis needs some qualification (cf. section 4.2.6 below); but let us discard, for the time being, the hypothesis that in T7 Socrates is just cheating.

How must we interpret his argument then? Let us suppose that (5) is to be understood as an elliptical formulation of

- (5*) men always judge what is true *for them*,

supplying the missing Protagorean qualifier 'for them' as implicitly meant. This proposal is not as arbitrary as it could appear: there are a few other instances in the *Theaetetus* in which 'true', although used within the framework of MD, is not explicitly relativised (161d7, 167a8, 167c2, 172b6), but it is evident that the reader is asked to supply the qualifiers in thought.⁵¹ If we reinterpret (5) as (5*), Socrates' argument can be reconstructed as follows:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (a*) If men's judgements are always true <i>for them</i> (= (5*)), then | |
| men's judgements sometimes are false. | |
| (b) If men's judgements sometimes are false, then men's judgements | |
| sometimes are false. | |
| (c*) Either men's judgements are always true for them or men's | |
| judgements sometimes are false. | |
| <hr/> | |
| (d) Therefore, men's judgements sometimes are false. ⁵² | |

⁵⁰ Cf. Burnyeat 1976b: 174–5. As Chappell (2006: 112) emphasises, this appears even more clear when we consider that the argument 'is presented after eight Stephanus pages' worth (160e–168c) of close study of arguments ... all of which Plato evidently takes to be fallacious precisely because ... these arguments are careless about qualifiers in various ways'.

⁵¹ The unrelativised occurrence at 161d6–7, 'each one will himself be the only judge of his own things, and all these will be correct and true' (αὐτὸς τὰ αὐτοῦ ἕκαστος μόνος δοξάσει, ταῦτα δὲ πάντα ὀρθὰ καὶ ἀληθῆ), is particularly instructive, since it comes only a few lines after the relativised occurrence, at 161d2–3, 'for each one will be true whatever he may judge through perception' (ἕκαστῳ ἀληθὲς ἔσται ὃ ἂν δι' αἰσθήσεως δοξάζῃ), and the two sentences seem to be meant as interchangeable formulations of MD.

⁵² The reader will wonder why I have relativised only 'true', and not also 'false', which makes this new version of the argument look rather asymmetrical. It is reasonable to suppose that Socrates' argument

Would such an argument be sound? Whereas its validity and the truth of premisses (b) and (c*) are, again, unproblematic,⁵³ it is hard to imagine the rationale for (a*). The structure of T7 suggests that its consequent (the existence of false judgements) should follow from its antecedent (5*), i.e. MD itself, and (4), the universal agreement that (most) people believe that there are false judgements. But what can be inferred from these two premisses is the relativised conclusion that it is true *for those who judge so* that men sometimes judge falsely, where 'those who judge so' should include everyone except Protagoras and his acolytes. Consequently, it becomes mysterious how Socrates' dilemma is supposed to establish its unrelativised conclusion (d).

One could infer that our attempt to read (5) as implicitly relativised has turned out to be a dead end: we have avoided the Scylla of a sound but irrelevant or question-begging argument only at the high price of falling into the mouth of the Charybdis of sheer unsoundness. A small textual clue, however, suggests that we might be on the right track after all. Our uneasiness is Theodorus' uneasiness; we feel in need of clarification, Theodorus asks for clarification too (πῶς δῆ;). If T7's argument were to be interpreted at face value, without adding the qualifiers, it would be quite easy to see how it works, even for a character, like Theodorus, who is not particularly philosophically minded.⁵⁴ Since Theodorus is asking for clarification, it seems reasonable to suppose that Socrates will proceed by patiently providing it. This is, at any rate, what happens in the *Theaetetus* in all the six other circumstances in which Socrates' puzzled interlocutor utters πῶς δῆ; to demand some explanation (152d1, 154b10, 164c7, 172c7, 199c12, 201a6);⁵⁵ this, or at least some discernible signal that one is not

is aimed at refuting relativism *tout court*, and thus at establishing the existence of judgements which are false *simpliciter*, and not merely false relatively to the judge (although the existence of such judgements would already be a refutation of Protagoras' MD, it would be at the same time a refutation of commonsense 'absolutism'). If this is correct, then 'false' must not be relativised in (d), and thereby in the consequents of (a*) and (b); but then, since it is natural to suppose that (b) is true simply in virtue of its being a conditional of the form $p \rightarrow p$, 'false' in the antecedent of (b), and consequently 'false' in the second disjunct of (c*), must not be relativised either. One might even conjecture that Plato left out all the qualifiers in T7 (including the crucial one in the antecedent of the first conditional) to avoid making this asymmetry distractingly obvious.

⁵³ (c*) does not list all the possibilities exhaustively, but only the two alternatives relevant to the present discussion: Protagoras' relativism and the laymen's (and philosophers') ordinary view (the views that every judgement is absolutely true or absolutely false are not on the table here).

⁵⁴ Fine writes that 'Theodorus understandably asks for clarification' (1998a: 216): but once one has interpreted MD as infallibilism and Socrates' argument as directed against infallibilism, as she does, it becomes difficult to understand why it should be hard to see and accept the soundness of that straightforward argument.

⁵⁵ It is noteworthy that in all these cases the need for clarification does not betray any deficiency of Socrates' interlocutor (*Theaetetus* in five cases, *Theodorus* in one), but is caused by the elliptical and

going to satisfy one's interlocutor's request, is what a decent amount of dialectical politeness should guarantee, I suppose, in Socrates' time just as today. Modern commentators do not seem to agree on my rule of thumb concerning ancient etiquette: they suggest that in what follows we find a *new* argument (or even two new arguments, as some have maintained) against MD.⁵⁶

4.2.3 How to relativise truth and falsehood

This is how the exchange between Socrates and Theodorus proceeds:

T8 Socr.: When you have formed a judgement about something in yourself, and express a judgement about it to me, let's grant that, in accordance with his [*sc.* Protagoras'] λόγος, this is true for you; but isn't it possible for the rest of us to form a judgement on your judgement? Or do we always judge that you judge what is true? Or is it rather the case that on every occasion there are countless people who are in conflict with you, judging the opposite (ἀντιδοξάζοντες), and believe that you judge and think something false?

Theod.: Good heavens, yes, Socrates, countless thousands, as Homer says, who give me all the trouble humanly possible!

Socr.: What then? Do you want us to say that on those occasions you judge something that is true for you (σαυτῷ), but false for those countless people (τοῖς δὲ μυρίοις)?

Theod.: It looks as if it is necessary, according to the λόγος, at any rate.⁵⁷ (170d4–e6)

This passage offers a lucid account of how we should deal, on the basis of MD, with conflicting judgements. Suppose that Theodorus judges that *p* and others judge that his judgement is false. According to Protagoras' MD (κατὰ τὸν ἐκείνου λόγον, ἔκ γε τοῦ λόγου), we should say that since Theodorus judges that *p* then *p* is true *for Theodorus*, and since

objectively obscure way in which Socrates has expressed his thought, often alluding to something he is still to explain properly.

⁵⁶ McDowell (1973: 169–70) is one notable exception: although he does not stress the point, he seems to understand the argument at 170e7–171c7 as an explanation of the more compressed argument in T7. Sedley's (2004: 57) reconstruction of the structure of the passage is not liable to my objection, since it locates the beginning of the second argument before Theodorus' request, at 170d1–2.

⁵⁷ ΣΩ. Ὅταν σὺ κρίνας τι παρὰ σαυτῷ τὴν μετὰ ποσὴν περὶ τίνος δόξαν, σοὶ μὲν δὴ τοῦτο κατὰ τὸν ἐκείνου λόγον ἀληθὲς ἔστω, ἡμῖν δὲ δὴ τοῖς ἄλλοις περὶ τῆς σῆς κρίσεως πότερον οὐκ ἔστιν κριταῖς γενέσθαι, ἢ αἰεὶ σὲ κρίνομεν ἀληθῆ δοξάζειν; ἢ μυρίοι ἐκάστοτε σοὶ μάχονται ἀντιδοξάζοντες, ἡγούμενοι ψευδῆ κρίνειν τε καὶ οἶσθαι; ΘΕΟ. Νῆ τὸν Δία, ὦ Σώκρατες, μάλα μυρίοι δῆτα, φησὶν Ὀμηρος, οἳ γέ μοι τὰ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων πράγματα παρέχουσιν.

ΣΩ. Τί οὖν; βούλει λέγωμεν ὡς σὺ τότε σαυτῷ μὲν ἀληθῆ δοξάζεις, τοῖς δὲ μυρίοις ψευδῆ; ΘΕΟ. Ἔοικεν ἔκ γε τοῦ λόγου ἀνάγκη εἶναι.

his opponents judge that *p* is false then *p* is false for them.⁵⁸ Of course there is nothing excitingly new in this: this is exactly what we should have expected given the way MD has been shaped throughout the dialogue. But since only a few lines before the Protagorean λόγος had apparently altered into a different thesis, because of the absence of qualifiers, this transitional passage turns out to be important: it supports my hypothesis that the qualifiers should also be supplied a few lines before, in Socrates' dilemmatic argument in T7, unless one prefers to attribute to Plato a quite schizophrenic attitude towards MD (and much more so, if one accepts my hypothesis that T8 begins an explanation of how Socrates' dilemma works).⁵⁹

Having proposed a model treatment of qualifiers in the event of conflicting judgements, Socrates applies it to Protagoras' case. He starts from what he takes to be a datum: the vast majority of people do not believe that man is the measure. If Protagoras himself does not believe⁶⁰ his own doctrine either, then no one believes it,⁶¹ and thus, according to MD itself, Protagoras' truth⁶² is true for nobody (170e7–171a1). This might sound like a counterfactual hypothesis: through the self-refutation argument, Socrates will aim at showing that it is not as notional as it could appear. If we suppose, on the contrary, that at least Protagoras does believe his MD, a first consequence is that MD is still false for many more people than those for whom it is true: along the lines of the previous example about Theodorus, we should say that MD is true only for Protagoras but false for countless thousands, and thus, in this relativistic sense,⁶³ more false than true (171a1–5).

⁵⁸ The choice of an example in which 'countless people' judge someone else's judgement to be false is not random, since it is parallel to what happens with Protagoras' MD.

⁵⁹ Incidentally, T8 provides the strongest evidence against Waterlow's (1977) claim that Protagoras' MD, being a form of relativism 'of fact', never relativises truth.

⁶⁰ More precisely, 'did not believe': at the dramatic date of the dialogue (399 BC) Protagoras is long dead. However, Socrates does not exploit this fact here: he might have said, for example, 'Either MD has never been true for anyone, or, at any rate, is not true for anyone now'. Later, Socrates does speak of Protagoras as if he were alive and facing his opponents, but immediately Plato reminds us that Protagoras is dead by having him emerging from the underworld (cf. section 4.2.6 below).

⁶¹ This sounds surprising: after all, one would think there must be other Protagoreans around endorsing, or at least pretending to endorse, MD. Perhaps we should intend 'Protagoras' as 'Protagoras and his faction'. However, this inaccuracy is not too damaging for Socrates: the same argument which he will use to show that Protagoras can be forced to join the anti-MD consensus (cf. section 4.2.4 below) could be used against any Protagorean.

⁶² 'The truth that he wrote' is a pun, referring to MD but also to Protagoras' work, *Truth* ('Αλήθεια), beginning with it. It also echoes Protagoras' words at 166c9–d1: 'For I do say that the truth is as I have written it'.

⁶³ I do not see compelling textual reasons for thinking that this conclusion is suspect because every person's judgement is being 'given weight in deciding, by a count of heads, to what extent any proposition is true *simpliciter*' (McDowell 1973: 10). Fine, who interprets Protagoras as an infallibilist

4.2.4 The most clever feature of Protagoras' MD

There is a second, more unexpected consequence coming next:

T9 Socr.: Secondly, it has this most clever feature (τοῦτ' ἔχει κομψότατον): on the one hand, he [*sc.* Protagoras] concedes (συγχωρεῖ), in some way, that regarding his own opinion the opinion of those who judge the opposite (τῶν ἀντιδοξαζόντων) (by which they think that he says something false) is true, since he agrees (ὁμολογῶν) that all men judge what is the case (τὰ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἅπαντας).

Theod.: Undoubtedly.

Socr.: And then, if he admits (ὁμολογεῖ) the truth of the opinion of those who think that he says something false (αὐτὸν ψεύδεσθαι), he is conceding (συγχωροῖ) the falsehood of his own opinion?

Theod.: Yes, necessarily.

Socr.: On the other hand, the others don't concede that they are saying something false (οὐ συγχωροῦσιν ἑαυτοὺς ψεύδεσθαι)?⁶⁴

Theod.: No indeed.

Socr.: But he, again, admits (ὁμολογεῖ) that also this judgement is true, according to what he wrote?

Theod.: So it appears.

Socr.: It will be disputed (ἀμφισβητήσεται), therefore, by everyone, beginning with Protagoras – or rather, it will be admitted (ὁμολογήσεται) by him, when he concedes (συγχωρῇ) to the person who contradicts him that he judges truly – when he does that, even Protagoras himself will be conceding (συγχωρήσεται) that neither a dog nor just any human being is the measure of anything at all which he hasn't learnt. Isn't that so?⁶⁵

Theod.: It is.⁶⁶ (171a6–c4)

and does not attach any importance to the presence of the qualifiers, interprets this passage as a complete refutation of Protagoras: MD is both absolutely true (because Protagoras believes that it is true) and absolutely false (because everyone else believes that it is false), 'and so is necessarily false' (1998a: 227). But why should Socrates emphasise that MD is more false than true, if what he is interested in is just showing that it turns out to be both true and false, and thus necessarily false? (And why, at any rate, does he not draw this very conclusion?) Why should Socrates be interested in showing in the following part of the passage that Protagoras also joins the anti-MD consensus? On Fine's reading of Protagoras' MD, a single dissenter in a world in which everyone else is a Protagorean would already be sufficient to prove that MD is false.

⁶⁴ I shall argue below that this line must be read and interpreted differently.

⁶⁵ For a different construal of this convoluted sentence based on different punctuation cf. Sedley 2004: 60.

⁶⁶ ΣΩ. Ἐπειτά γε τοῦτ' ἔχει κομψότατον: ἐκεῖνος μὲν περὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ οἰήσεως τὴν τῶν ἀντιδοξαζόντων οἴησιν, ἣ ἐκεῖνον ἡγοῦνται ψεύδεσθαι, συγχωρεῖ που ἀληθῆ εἶναι ὁμολογῶν τὰ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἅπαντας.

ΘΕΟ. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν τὴν αὐτοῦ ἂν ψευδῇ συγχωροῖ, εἰ τὴν τῶν ἡγουμένων αὐτὸν ψεύδεσθαι ὁμολογεῖ ἀληθῆ εἶναι;

ΘΕΟ. Ἀνάγκη.

After a long journey, we have finally arrived at Socrates' so-called 'most clever' self-refutation argument. I have adopted this label noncommittally, simply because it, or some other analogous label suggesting that the argument is particularly 'ingenious', 'exquisite', or 'subtle', is used by most commentators,⁶⁷ with rare exceptions. However, I urge us to abandon this established use here, since it is based, I believe, on a misreading of the first line of T9 (171a6): the unstated subject in ἐπειτὰ γε τοῦτ' ἔχει κομψότατον must be 'the ἀλήθεια that he [sc. Protagoras] wrote' (170e9–171a1), i.e. MD itself and Protagoras' work, *Truth*, commencing with it. It is not Socrates' forthcoming self-refutation argument against MD that is singled out as 'most clever' at the beginning of T9; it is MD itself that 'has this most clever feature',⁶⁸ where 'this' refers forward to the surprising fact that even its inventor, Protagoras, can be forced to reject it because of self-refutation. Is being doomed to repudiation by its own creator a sign of particular cleverness for a philosophical thesis? Since the answer must be no, we should understand Socrates' remark as mocking:⁶⁹ after all, neither do the two other occurrences of the adjective κομψός ('clever') in the *Theaetetus* (156a3,⁷⁰ 202d10)⁷¹ express Socrates' unmixed praise.

Having bracketed the prejudice that T9's self-refutation argument must be particularly clever (of course it is perfectly possible that it will turn out to

ΣΩ. Οἱ δὲ γ' ἄλλοι οὐ συγχωροῦσιν ἑαυτοὺς ψεύδεσθαι;

ΘΕΟ. Οὐ γὰρ οὖν.

ΣΩ. Ὅ δὲ γ' αὐτὸ ὁμολογεῖ καὶ ταύτην ἀληθῆ τὴν δόξαν ἐξ ὧν γέγραπεν.

ΘΕΟ. Φαίνεται.

ΣΩ. Ἐξ ἀπάντων ἄρα ἀπὸ Πρωταγόρου ἀρξαμένων ἀμφισβητήσεται, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑπὸ γε ἐκείνου ὁμολογήσεται, ὅταν τῷ τάναντία λέγοντι συγχωρῇ ἀληθῆ αὐτὸν δοξάζειν, τότε καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρας αὐτὸς συγχωρήσεται μήτε κύνα μήτε τὸν ἐπιτυχόντα ἀνθρώπον μέτρον εἶναι μηδὲ περὶ ἐνὸς οὐδ' ἂν μὴ μάθη. οὐχ οὕτως;

ΘΕΟ. Οὕτως.

⁶⁷ E.g. 'especially clever refutation' (Fine 1998a: 208–9), 'the "cleverer" second phase [of the argument]' (McCabe 1994a: 278), 'very subtle argument' (Bostock 1988: 89), 'the subtlest argument' (Polansky 1992: 130), 'most subtle argument' (Sedley 2004: 60), 'really exquisite argument' (Burnyeat 1976b: 177), 'most ingenious argument' (Waterlow 1977: 19), 'argument...ingenious' (Chappell 2006: 135), 'exquisite argument' (e.g. Tigner 1971: 366, Lee 1973: 243, Long 2004: 35, Wedin 2005: 171), 'most exquisite argument' (Silverman 2000: 120n19).

⁶⁸ For the same construction cf. *Phdr.* 275d4, *Chrm.* 172b1. Gottlieb (1992: 189) seems to construe the text in the way I propose. Surprisingly enough, most of the commentators mentioned in the previous note translate the passage correctly (cf. e.g. Burnyeat 1976b: 173).

⁶⁹ On this interpretation Socrates' remark echoes his claim in the *Euthydemus* that the (Protagorean) λόγος according to which it is impossible to contradict is θαυμαστός ('amazing') for him, because it 'overturns not just the other λόγοι, but itself as well' (286c3–4; cf. T2 on pp. 32–3). Cf. also Socrates' irony at *Euthd.* 303d7–e4 (p. 230n94).

⁷⁰ The proponents of SD are 'much more subtle' (πολύ κομψότεροι) than those uninitiates who do not admit the existence of anything except what they can touch and see.

⁷¹ What seems the 'most subtle point' (κομψότατος) in 'Socrates' dream' (201d–202d) is that the elements are unknowable but the complexes knowable.

be such), let us examine it. Its most puzzling feature is the new unexpected disappearance of qualifiers, beginning with the unrelativised formulation of MD as 'all men judge what is the case' at 171a9. As we have seen, the qualifiers were in their place in the formulation of MD introducing the whole section (170a3–4) and again, repeatedly, only a few lines before T9 (170d5, 170e4–5, 170e9: cf. section 4.2.3 above).

The same thorny problem encountered with T7's dilemmatic argument comes back to haunt us here: could Socrates be unwittingly guilty of *ignoratio elenchi*, or have dropped the qualifiers purposely, to weaken Protagoras' resistance?⁷² A more promising proposal, powerfully advocated by Burnyeat and accepted by many interpreters, is that Plato wanted us, the readers, to realise by ourselves that we should restore the missing qualifiers in T9, and to understand by ourselves how the argument would then work. In section 4.2.2 I provisionally adopted the same conjecture as the most plausible in interpreting T7's dilemma; however, I had to admit that it was mysterious for me (just as for Theodorus) how that argument could be sound once we supplied the missing qualifiers. Prima facie, adding the qualifiers does not help us with T9 either: since Protagoras believes that (1) 'all men judge what is the case <for them>', he must admit that (2) the judgement of those who believe that MD is false is true <for them>, and thus that (3) MD is false <for them>. MD cannot be an absolute truth if it falls within its own scope (something which, interestingly, is never called into question in the *Theaetetus*)⁷³ and thus each man must be the measure also of his own being a measure and of other men's being measures. But why should this conclusion be damaging for Protagoras? Surprisingly enough, in the *Theaetetus* Protagoras is often described as someone who *asserts* his MD as an absolute, unqualified truth:⁷⁴ 'Man is the measure of all things' (152a2–3), 'I do say that the truth is as I have written it' (166c9–d1), 'You have to put up with being a measure, whether you like it or not' (167d3–4) are telltale examples. Protagoras' admission that (3) MD is false for his opponents would

⁷² This question is answered affirmatively by various interpreters, including e.g. Kerferd 1949, Vlastos 1956: xivn29, Runciman 1962: 16; Sayre 1969: 87–90, Schiappa 1991: 193, Mendelson 2002: 19–20.

⁷³ *Contra* Sedley 2004: 48.

⁷⁴ Cf. Burnyeat 1976b: 190, Waterlow 1977: 21, Bemelmans 2002: 78 (*contra* Zilioli 2007: 116–18). Protagoras' assertive tone seems to violate the rule expressed at 160b8–c1: 'Whether one uses "be" or "come to be" of something, one should speak of it as being, or coming to be, for something or of something or in relation to something; one shouldn't say that a thing is or comes to be anything just by itself, and one shouldn't accept that someone else say this either' (εἴτε τις εἰναι τι ὀνομάζει, τινὶ εἶναι ἢ τινὸς ἢ πρὸς τι ρητέον αὐτῷ, εἴτε γίνεσθαι αὐτὸ δὲ ἐφ' αὐτοῦ τι ἢ ὅν ἢ γιγνόμενον οὔτε αὐτῷ λεκτέον οὔτ' ἄλλου λέγοντος ἀποδεκτέον). Analogously, SD is presented as an unqualifiedly true ontology (cf. Sedley 2004: 48), but this clashes with the relativism such an ontology is supposed to back and justify.

certainly be sufficient to compel him to abandon this inappropriate way of presenting his theory; none the less, by granting that MD is false for them, albeit true for him,⁷⁵ Protagoras does not seem committed to admitting *in propria persona* that MD is false *simpliciter*, the ostensible conclusion of T9, since the idea that MD must be true for everyone, or true absolutely, does not seem to be part of MD itself.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Several interpreters emphasise that this concession is already sufficient to make Protagoras' position uninteresting and solipsistic, and that this is the strongest lesson to be learnt from Plato's refutation of Protagoras, even if Socrates' argument fails to establish that Protagoras himself must admit the absolute falsehood of MD *in propria persona* (cf. e.g. Lee 1973: 246–8, Waterfield 1973: 176, McDowell 1973: 71, Waterlow 1977: 35–6, Bostock 1988: 95, McCabe 1994a: 279, Chappell 2005: 114).

⁷⁶ Burnyeat's influential contention is that this impression is misguided: once we have understood the full import of the admission that MD is false for those who judge it false, we realise that Protagoras cannot concede this and at the same time refuse to grant that MD is false *simpliciter*. I cannot present and discuss Burnyeat's proposal here, for which I refer to Castagnoli 2004a: 15–18 (for criticism of Burnyeat's reading along similar lines cf. also Wedin 2005: 174–8). My main perplexity concerned Burnyeat's use of the metaphor of 'private worlds': something is true for *x* if and only if it is true in *x*'s world, so by conceding that MD is false for them Protagoras would be conceding that none of his opponents 'lives in a world in which his mere belief in a proposition is either a sufficient or a necessary condition for its truth (in that world). But that *everyone* lives in such a world is precisely what the Measure doctrine asserts' (1976b: 182). I believe that in Castagnoli 2004a I failed to emphasise sufficiently the real crux of that use. By excluding the possibility that a world might be incorporated into another as 'incoherent', solipsistic, and almost nonsense (191), Burnyeat is in fact denying the possibility of saying that, if Socrates does not believe MD and Protagoras is aware of this, then it is true for Protagoras that what Socrates believes is true for Socrates (i.e. the possibility that it is true for Protagoras that MD is false for Socrates). In other words, denying the possibility of private worlds embedded into other private worlds is the same as denying the possibility of 'repeatable qualifiers' (the idea that Protagorean qualifiers must be unrepeatable is argued for by Denyer 1991: 90–4).

The 'single-relativisation assumption' ('no truth is or could be hierarchically relativised to *two or more* subjects') is also used by Sedley (2004: 57–62) to vindicate the soundness of Socrates' argument in T9: 'When Protagoras is forced to agree that his opponents' view is correct, the reason why this is not qualified as "correct *for them*" is that his responses are establishing what is true in his own world' (61), since T9's argument is implicitly governed by 'What is the case *for Protagoras himself*?' at 170e7 and double-relativisations are barred. (Sedley adopts the same strategy to explain the apparent lack of qualifiers in T7: he reads τῷ Πρωταγόρῃ at 170c2 with MSS B and D, and takes the following dilemmatic argument to be governed by this qualifier ('How then shall we run the argument *for Protagoras*?'), which bars the addition of further nested qualifiers.) I am not sure that in the absence of any explicit evidence for this single-relativisation assumption in the *Theaetetus* we are entitled to make it the core of Protagoras' refutation on the basis of the argument *ex silentio* that no double relativisation occurs in the *Theaetetus*. In fact one might wonder why Plato should have failed to emphasise (or at least hint at) the crucial point that double relativisations are senseless if this were the kernel of his strategy. Moreover, on the basis of the single-relativisation assumption *any* conflict of judgements of which one is aware would commit MD to blatant contradiction: for example, if Protagoras judges that Socrates is pale and also that Socrates believes of himself that he is tanned, then Socrates must be at the same time pale and not pale (tanned) for Protagoras (i.e. in Protagoras' world), since Protagoras cannot say that it is true for him that it is true for Socrates that Socrates is tanned. For discussion and criticism of the single-relativisation assumption cf. also Chappell 2006: 113–20.

Chappell's own proposal is that Socrates is warranted in dropping the qualifiers because Protagoras' aim is to *reduce* truth to relative truth: 'the supposition that the properties of the

The first step towards my solution to our puzzle will consist in interpreting the central lines of Socrates' argument in T9 (171b4–8: 'On the other hand . . . what he wrote?'). Their function was left unexplained by commentators until Emilsson (1994) first highlighted their crucial role as a way of 'disarming' Protagoras of his qualifiers. Since these lines come immediately before the conclusion, which is introduced by ἄρα ('therefore'), one would in fact expect them to make some major contribution towards it.

Emilsson reconstructs in direct form the imaginary dialogue between Protagoras and his opponents which is being discussed within the main dialogue between Socrates and Theodorus in T9.⁷⁷ His dialogical transposition of lines b4–5 (οἱ δὲ γ' ἄλλοι οὐ συγχωροῦσιν ἑαυτοὺς ψεύδεσθαι;) is the cornerstone of his reading. Emilsson notices that it would be quite unnatural to describe Protagoras' opponents' spontaneous assertion that they are not wrong in maintaining that MD is false as the refusal to *concede* something: 'in a dialogue context, as here, "don't admit" indeed suggests that Protagoras is supposed to have said something to which the opponents refuse to give their assent', something which Plato fails to record (1994: 140). But what might Protagoras have said? Certainly not that his opponents are mistaken; what Protagoras is allowed to retort is that his opponents' view on MD is false *for him* (i.e. that MD is true for him). But his opponents do not concede this, do not concede that they are saying something which is false for Protagoras; they want to say that MD is false *simpliciter*:

Protagoras: But you must admit that your view [that MD is false] is false for me.
Opponents: No, we don't admit that we are saying something false <for you>.

Now Protagoras himself cannot help admitting (ὁμολογεῖ), in accordance with his own theory, that this judgement of his opponents is also true (lines b7–8), this time without qualification. For, according to Emilsson, 'the objection that Plato's argument depends on ignoring the qualifiers is misplaced' here, since the function of the previous lines 'is precisely to

analysandum – truth – transfer across to the *analysans* – truth for – leads Protagoras into the contradictory position of accepting that his philosophical opponents' views may justly be described not just as true for them, but as true *simpliciter*' (2006: 130). However, to refute Protagoras by saddling him with such an extreme brand of reductionism seems to me not very different from, and no less question-begging than, treating the relativist Protagoras as a subjectivist.

According to Hankinson (1995: 46) 'radical relativism', i.e. a form of relativism in which the qualifiers are repeatable, is not susceptible of self-refutation.

⁷⁷ Socrates is making the most of Protagoras' earlier concession to use the method of question and answer in the examination of MD (cf. p. 43).

show that Protagoras' opponents will not accept the answer which the critics have thought available to him' (1994: 142–3).

Emilsson's interesting strategy suffers two weaknesses: first, as he himself admits, the text of T9 is taken to be considerably more complex than it seems to be on the surface (notably, nothing in Plato's Greek at 171b4–8 corresponds to Protagoras' line, and implicit qualifiers need to be supplemented throughout); second, more needs to be said on why after his opponents' reply Protagoras should be forced to abandon his qualifiers altogether. I shall attempt a more straightforward reading of lines b4–8 and offer a different elucidation of how exactly they are meant to disarm Protagoras of the qualifiers.

My reading relies on the adoption, at line b4, of the *lectio* ἑαυτοῖς (with MSS B, D and T) in lieu of ἑαυτοῦς (MS W), which we find in the most recent Oxford Classical Texts edition of the *Theaetetus* and which is accepted by the majority of interpreters, including Emilsson.⁷⁸ Let us reconstruct the argument step by step, transposing Socrates' description of the exchange between Protagoras and his opponents into a direct dialogue, following Emilsson's example. By admitting that the opinion of his opponents about MD is true (for them), Protagoras is conceding that MD is false: false *for them*, of course (171a6–b3: I intend the missing qualifiers as implicit, like Burnyeat, Emilsson and many others):

- (1) Opponents: When you say that 'Man is the measure of all things' you say something false.
- (2) Protagoras: I concede that this view of yours is true <for you>, since according to MD all men believe what is the case <for them>.
- (3) Opponents: So your MD is false.
- (4) Protagoras: I concede that MD is false <for you>.

But his opponents are not content with Protagoras' concession in (4): they are not ready to grant this qualification, that by MD *he says something which is false for them* (οὐ συγχωροῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς ψεύδεσθαι). I suggest we take αὐτόν (Protagoras) as the unstated subject of ψεύδεσθαι (compare αὐτόν ψεύδεσθαι immediately before, at line b2) and ἑαυτοῖς as a genuine Protagorean relativiser. Since, 'if there is no specific subject of the infinitive

⁷⁸ Hicken's edition in Duke *et al.* 1995 (cf. also Campbell 1883, McDowell 1973, Narcy 1995). Wohlrab 1891, Burnet 1900–7: vol. 1 and Diès 1924 read ἑαυτοῖς (but Diès does not translate it). Among the interpreters, Polansky 1992 and Bemelmans 2002 adopt ἑαυτοῖς and read it as a Protagorean qualifier.

then the indefinite accusative idea takes over . . . but such an indefinite or generic turn of thought is often used when there is in fact a specific reference within the context',⁷⁹ the most accurate translation of this line might be 'the others do not concede that one can say something false for them', where the indefinite 'one' alludes to Protagoras, referred to immediately before. Alternatively, it is not wild speculation that Plato might in fact have originally written αὐτόν ἑαυτοῖς ψεύδεσθαι or ἑαυτοῖς αὐτόν ψεύδεσθαι, but αὐτόν inadvertently dropped out of our manuscript tradition at some early stage (notice that the alternative and minority *lectio* ἑαυτοῦς is suspect also on purely linguistic grounds: 'if the subject of the infinitive is the same as the subject of the leading verb . . . the proper accusative subject is usually displaced by the nominative of the original expression of the idea').⁸⁰ One might protest that ψεύδεσθαι in connection with Protagorean qualifiers ('to say something false for . . .') is not used anywhere else in the *Theaetetus*, and thus ἑαυτοῖς, even if accepted, would be much more naturally read in conjunction with the preceding συγχωροῦσιν.⁸¹ Notice, however, that we have encountered two sufficiently close parallels in T8 (170e4–5): 'you judge something that is true for you' (σπαντῶ ἀληθῆ δοξάζεις) and 'you judge something that is false for countless thousands' (τοῖς μυρίοις ψευδῆ <δοξάζεις>).⁸²

Why are Protagoras' opponents unwilling to accept Protagoras' concession in (4)? What they believe is that Protagoras, by advancing his MD, is saying something simply false, and not only false for them alone (or indeed for anyone else); certainly they are not ready to grant Protagoras

⁷⁹ Cooper 1998: 774.

⁸⁰ Cooper 1998: 771. Unfortunately, however, this cannot settle the question, since there are exceptions to the general rule, some of which can be found in Plato.

As we have seen, Emilsson, who reads ἑαυτοῦς at line b4, must supply before it Protagoras' implicit reply 'But you must admit that your view is false for me'. Emilsson examines the reading ἑαυτοῖς, but he rejects it on the grounds that 'not even in Protagorean language does there seem to be anything describable as "being wrong for oneself"' (1994: 139n8). This is correct, but Emilsson fails to see the possibility, which I defend here, of taking Protagoras, and not Protagoras' opponents, as the subject of ψεύδεσθαι.

Bemelmans, who reads ἑαυτοῖς, translates lines b4–5 as follows: 'But the others don't concede that it is (true) for *themselves*, that what he thinks is false' (2002: 80). This is consistent with my reading, but I find the addition of 'it is (true) . . . that' unnecessary. Polansky's paraphrase is very similar to Bemelmans' translation (1992: 131), but then he adds that 'Socrates' withholding of the qualifying labels "to him" and "to them" is playfully unfair'.

⁸¹ I thank especially David Sedley for impressing this point upon me, and for making me realise that my *prima facie* strained reading of line b4 needed careful support.

⁸² Moreover, the notion itself of conceding (rather than e.g. admitting) something to oneself sounds problematic.

that MD may be true for him.⁸³ On my interpretation, at lines b4–5 the qualifier (ἐαυτοῖς) does make its appearance in the text: unlike Burnyeat, Emilsson and many other interpreters, who make qualifiers a major issue in T9 in spite of their *complete* absence, I ask the reader to intend them as implicitly meant only in the first part of the passage (at 171a8, a9, b1, b2), where it is not so difficult to accept the integration given that they are firm in their place both immediately above (170e9) and, on my reading of the text, below (171b4).

What can Protagoras reply to his opponents' refusal to qualify their denial of MD? He cannot protest that they are mistaken: according to MD, he must admit that their belief that MD is not false for them (but simply false) is true (171b7–8). We would have expected a qualified admission that this second-order belief too is true *for them only*; surely we must supply another missing relativiser? If we did so we would end up with our original problem unsolved: how could Socrates force in the lines which immediately follow (171b10–c3) Protagoras' admission that MD is unqualifiedly false? Lines b4–5 suggest that Protagoras' opponents are not ready to accept any relativisation of the truth of their judgements; however, *prima facie* this does not seem to require that Protagoras himself gets rid of the qualifiers. For, apparently, he might continue relativising the truth and falsehood of his opponents' claims, without contesting their refusals to accept such relativisations: in this way Protagoras would be giving up any hope of persuading his opponents, but at least would steal a draw by forcing a deadlock.⁸⁴ Emilsson suggests that, since Protagoras cannot reject as false his opponents' refusals to relativise the truth-value of their claims, his opponents 'could simply say "Since you have no objection at all, Protagoras, we understand that you have given your admission to our statement"' (1994: 145), i.e. pretend that Protagoras himself has admitted the unqualified falsehood of MD. However, this would be a rather unfair treatment of Protagoras' dialectical behaviour: as long as he continues relativising the truth of his opponents' unrelativised claims (something from which he has not yet been proved to be barred), he should not be taken to endorse them on the grounds that he does not

⁸³ Textual support for this reading might come from a subsequent passage, in which Theodoros, referring back to T9, says that Protagoras' λόγος 'is refuted also when it makes other people's judgements authoritative, but they clearly think that his theories (λόγους) are *in no way* (οὐδαμῇ) true' (179b7–9).

⁸⁴ In this way, however, he would fail to qualify for wisdom in the sense of the superior skill to change others' appearances or beliefs (cf. p. 44). According to Bemelmans, continuing to qualify the truth of his opponents' claims is not a viable option for Protagoras because 'this would lead to an infinite regress' (2002: 82), but he fails to explain why such a regress should be dangerous for Protagoras, or at any rate imputable to Protagoras more than to his opponents (they stubbornly go on denying Protagoras' qualifications just as Protagoras goes on qualifying their denials).

reject them as absolutely false (to require him to do this would be only another way of begging the question against MD).⁸⁵

I suggest that, despite appearances, after his opponents' refusal to accept relativisations in the key lines b4–5 Protagoras *cannot* continue adding his qualifiers, provided we take into full account T9's dialectical context. Let us reconstruct how the exchange would unfold if Protagoras did cling to his qualifiers:

- (4) Protagoras: I concede that MD is false <for you>.
- (5) Opponents: But we don't concede this to you. We don't concede that MD is false *for us*. As we have said, MD is just false.
- (6) Protagoras: I concede that this is also true, *for you*. It's true for you that MD is not false for you, but false = I concede this too: MD is false for you (= (4), against (5))

Protagoras' final remark (6) is only apparently one more harmless admission of the relative truth of his opponents' claim. If, as it seems plausible, 'It is true for *x* that *y* is *F*' amounts to the same as '*y* is *F* for *x*', Protagoras' attempt to remain faithful to his MD in (6) by conceding, once again, the relative truth of his opponents' claim (5) would be equivalent to an *unqualified denial* of that claim, oddly presented as an agreement ('I concede . . .'). On this occasion relativising would not be, ultimately, a way of escaping contradiction by granting a qualified acceptance to someone else's conflicting judgement, without endorsing it *in propria persona*, but a way of openly contradicting it, thereby also contradicting MD itself. As McCabe notices, 'disagreement with everyone else is inaccessible to him [*sc.* Protagoras]; all he can ever do is agree' (2000: 43); but in this case even qualified agreement would be inaccessible to Protagoras, since it would amount to the same as disagreement, dooming him to inconsistency. Moreover, in (6) Protagoras would be repeating, in slightly different terms, what he has already said a few seconds before, in (4), and which he knows has not been (and will not be) accepted by his opponents. In other words, he would be merely 'babbling', i.e. committing something analogous to the *dialectical error* later identified by Aristotle:

⁸⁵ Waterlow seems liable to a similar objection. Since, on Waterlow's interpretation, Protagoras, being a relativist 'of fact', does not relativise truth, his agreements, which actually do not imply a sharing of the judgements agreed upon, are misinterpreted by the non-Protagoreans: 'his opponents' position is one which he too would be publicly taken to represent. For this is just what would, by normal public standards, be said of him, given that he answers "True" to his opponents' every assertion' (1977: 31).

110 Whoever keeps on asking one thing for a long time is a bad questioner. For if he does so although the person questioned keeps on answering the question, clearly he asks many questions, or asks the same question many times, so that either he babbles (ἀδολεσχεῖ) or he fails to deduce. (Top. 8.2, 158a25–8)⁸⁶

I suggest that it is for these reasons that after lines b4–8 Protagoras must give up his qualifiers, willy-nilly, and concede what his opponents say, i.e. that MD is false.⁸⁷ This admission is taken by Socrates and Theodorus as evidence that everyone, including Protagoras, disputes MD (171b10–c4): the anti-MD consensus is now universal. What at 170e7–171a1 had appeared as a merely counterfactual possibility has turned out to be the necessary outcome of the clash between Protagoras and his opponents. The result of the dialectical manoeuvre described in T9 is not the demonstration that MD must be false, but Protagoras' admission that MD is false as a consequence of his acceptance of MD itself.⁸⁸

Several interpreters have construed instead T9's self-refutation argument as a formal proof of the logical falsehood of MD by *Consequentia Mirabilis*:

If MD is true, then MD is false; therefore MD is false.⁸⁹

However, not only does T9's train of reasoning fail to warrant such a way of divesting the self-refutation argument of its dialogical clothing; it is not easy to see how the argument above could ever succeed in proving the falsehood of Protagoras' MD (notice, once again, the missing qualifiers). Grasping this point is fundamental to understanding the rationale of the next and final step of Socrates' argument:

111 Then, since it is disputed (ἀμφισβητεῖται) by everyone, Protagoras' truth⁹⁰ is not true for anyone, neither for anyone else, nor for himself.⁹¹ (171c5–7)

⁸⁶ ὅστις ὁ ἓνα λόγον πολὺν χρόνον ἑρωτᾷ, κακῶς πυνθάνεται. εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἀποκρινόμενου τοῦ ἑρωτῶμενου τὸ ἑρωτῶμενον, δῆλον ὅτι πολλὰ ἑρωτήματα ἑρωτᾷ ἢ πολλάκις ταῦτά, ὥστε ἢ ἀδολεσχεῖ ἢ οὐκ ἔχει συλλογισμὸν. Protagoras would not be asking the same question many times, but would be proposing exactly the same relativised claim many times, thus asking his opponents to concede it.

⁸⁷ Could Protagoras claim that what his opponents say is false? No, since he would be thus unwittingly denying MD (cf. Dionysodorus' downfall in section 4.1 of this chapter).

⁸⁸ I agree with Waterlow (1977: 27) that '171a6–c7 is not a proof of inconsistency', but I disagree with her suggestion (shared by Arthur 1982: 336 and McCabe 2000: 46) that in any case Protagoras is not bound 'to accept the intellectual obligation to avoid inconsistency' (1977: 25).

⁸⁹ Cf. e.g. Vailati 1904, Kneale 1957: 63, Barnes 1982a: 543, Bellissima and Pagli 1996: 178. For an in-depth discussion of *Consequentia Mirabilis* and its relationship with the self-refutation argument cf. chapter 6, section 1.

⁹⁰ Cf. p. 50n62.

⁹¹ οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ ἀμφισβητεῖται ὑπὸ πάντων, οὐδενὶ ἂν εἴη ἡ Πρωταγόρου ἀλήθεια ἀληθής, οὔτε τινὶ ἄλλῳ οὐτ' αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ.

MD is still assumed as an implicit premiss here, along with T9's conclusion that everyone disputes MD, to draw the further conclusion that MD is not true for anyone (Protagoras included). If his previous argument had been intended by Socrates as a complete proof of MD's absolute falsehood, T11's final step would be redundant at best, and perhaps even unwarranted, since the conclusion that MD is false for everyone sounds like a weaker (and perhaps incompatible) one.

4.2.5 One argument, two formulations

At the end of section 4.2.2 above I suggested that the overall structure of the section 170a–171c requires reassessment: the second half of the passage (170e7–171c7) does not present any new argument against MD, but some kind of explanation of how the dilemmatic argument in T7 works. It is time to illustrate more clearly how T9's self-refutation argument can be interpreted as a clarification of T7's dilemma.

On p. 47 I argued that Socrates' dilemma needed to be supplemented with qualifiers: although the addition was not too problematic in itself, it left us with an argument whose first and key premiss, (a*) ('If men's judgements are always true for them, then men's judgements sometimes are false'), was puzzling. T9 is designed to show Theodorus and us why (a*) is justified, by disclosing the 'most clever' facet of Protagoras' MD. This schema will clarify the close correspondence between the two passages:

	170c3–5 (a*)	171a6–c4
MD	Men's judgements are always true <for them> (170c3)	All men judge what is the case <for them> (171a9)
Anti-MD consensus	(Most) men judge that there are false judgements (since (all) men believe in the existence of ignorance (170a6–b8) and (most) men believe that ignorance is false judgement (170b9–c1))	(Some) men (Protagoras' opponents) judge that MD is false (171a7–8)
	Inference left unexplained	Inference illustrated dialectically at 171a6–b9
⊢ MD is false	Men sometimes make false judgements (170c5)	Man is not the measure (171c1–4)

The antecedent and the consequent of (a*) (MD and its denial respectively) match, in content if not in exact wording, the initial premiss and the conclusion of T9's self-refutation argument. What might lead us to suppose that the mysterious reasoning underlying (a*) cannot be the same as that which we find in T9 is that their additional premisses seem to differ: (a*) relies on the widespread *general* belief in the existence of false judgement, whereas T9's argument appeals to the anti-Protagoreans' *specific* judgement that MD is false.

However, this surface difference fades and almost disappears altogether as soon as we consider more carefully the nature of the anti-MD consensus in T9: although 'the opinion of those who judge the opposite (by which they think that he [*sc.* Protagoras] says something false)' suggests an explicitly verbalised and specifically directed dissent against Protagoras, contextual clues indicate that the anti-MD consensus need not assume such a definite form. At 170e8–9 we are told that the masses do not believe MD, where the context makes it quite clear that this is intended to mean that they believe MD to be false, and at 171b10–11 we find the bold conclusion that, since Protagoras is compelled to admit that MD is false, everyone disputes it. Since it is safe to assume that in the Athens of the dawn of the fourth century BC the majority of people had never heard of Protagorean relativism, and so much the less bothered *disputing* it actively, Socrates must be adopting a generous notion of belief here: you can be said to disbelieve, and even dispute, MD even if you have never heard or thought of it, as long as you believe in the existence of false beliefs, which is inconsistent with MD. Furthermore, this belief in the existence of false beliefs does not need to be explicit itself: you can be said to have it even if you have never expressed it,⁹² or you do not have any full-blown concept of belief at all, provided that your behaviour shows this belief of yours. As we have seen above (pp. 44–5), Socrates' reasons for attributing to people the belief in the existence of ignorance and false judgement were based on observation of their behaviour, and in particular of their search for experts and leaders in certain situations. Since the belief that MD is false is a corollary of the belief that false judgements exist, T9's argument is nothing less than the expected elucidation of why (a*) is true and thus Socrates' dilemma in T7 is sound: it is meant to satisfy Theodorus' request for clarification at 170d3.⁹³

If my analysis is correct, a notable consequence regarding the nature of T7's dilemma follows. I have argued that the self-refutation argument in

⁹² Cf. Ketchum 1992: 78.

⁹³ Theodorus seems to understand without difficulty this new formulation of the argument.

T9 is intrinsically dialectical: it shows how even Protagoras can be forced to admit the falsehood of his MD when faced by someone who disagrees (or would disagree if asked), and so why no one can really uphold MD. Accordingly, T7's dilemma must be interpreted as a *dialectical challenge* to Protagoras ('What then, *Protagoras*, are we to make of your λόγος?'): whether we say (πότερον . . . φῶμεν) that MD is true, or that it is false, we will be finally compelled to *admit* that it is false (where 'we' are speaking on behalf of Protagoras too, since he could never contend that people do not believe in the existence of false judgements). Socrates' dilemma is not a proof by cases of the necessary falsehood of MD:⁹⁴ if this should appear an unwelcome result of my interpretation, consider that Socrates' declared aim was to obtain Protagoras' own agreement starting from his own λόγος (169e8–170a1).

4.2.6 Protagoras' return

Faced with T11's unfortunate conclusion, Theodorus, who was supposed to defend his dead friend (168e7–169a1) but could not help conceding all the steps which led to Protagoras' rout, protests: 'Socrates, we are running my friend too hard' (171c8–9). Socrates' reply is another deadly stab at Protagoras:

T12 But it's not clear, my friend, whether we are also running off the right track. It's likely at any rate, then, that he [*sc.* Protagoras], being older, is wiser than us; and if he suddenly popped up here from below, as far as the neck, he would probably accuse (ἐλέγξας) me of talking a great deal of nonsense, and you of agreeing with it, and then he would duck down again rushing off (καταδύς ἂν οἴχοιτο ἀποτρέχων). But I think we have to take ourselves as we are, and always say what seems to us to be the case (τὰ δοκοῦντα αἰεὶ ταῦτα λέγειν).⁹⁵ (171c10–d5)

This vivid image of Protagoras briefly returning from the underworld and then suddenly disappearing again has attracted, and quite deservedly, some attention in the literature.⁹⁶ What would Protagoras say should

⁹⁴ Cf. T69 on p. 191 for such an ancient reconstruction of T7.

⁹⁵ ἄλλά τοι, ὦ φίλε, ἄδηλον εἰ καὶ παραθέομεν τὸ ὀρθόν. εἰκός γε ἄρα ἐκεῖνον πρεσβύτερον ὄντα σοφώτερον ἡμῶν εἶναι· καὶ εἰ αὐτίκα ἐντεῦθεν ἀνακύψει μέχρι τοῦ αὐχένος, πολλὰ ἂν ἐμέ τε ἐλέγξας ληροῦντα, ὥς τὸ εἰκός, καὶ σὲ ὁμολογοῦντα, καταδύς ἂν οἴχοιτο ἀποτρέχων. ἀλλ' ἡμῖν ἀνάγκη οἶμαι χρῆσθαι ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς ὅποιοι τινὲς ἔσμεν, καὶ τὰ δοκοῦντα αἰεὶ ταῦτα λέγειν.

⁹⁶ The question has been debated whether Protagoras is depicted as emerging from water (according to some sources he died by drowning) or from the ground, in the way ghosts appeared in the Greek theatre (cf. Burnyeat 1976b: 192n23, Ford 1994).

he come back from Hades? And why would he rush off immediately afterwards?

According to Burnyeat, Protagoras might try to defend himself by insisting that he presented MD not as an absolute truth, but as something true for himself alone. Plato's image would represent this solipsistic move as Protagoras' refusal to enter fully into a 'common world' with his opponents for genuine discussion: 'coming from and retreating to another world from ours, he [*sc.* Protagoras] does not really leave the underworld' (1976b: 193n23). However, this would look more like a way of taking on board the criticism and defending MD by clarifying and narrowing it than a way of *accusing* Socrates of talking nonsense. In a similar vein, Lee conjectures that Protagoras would try to escape Socrates' self-refutation argument by restoring the qualifiers that Socrates deliberately and 'unjustly' left out, but 'at the high price of showing us that he himself is not asserting anything we can or should take "seriously"' (1973: 248).⁹⁷ by doing this Protagoras would end up being 'no better than a vegetable' (252). The image of Protagoras sticking his head up above the ground only as far as the neck would be meant to represent him as a plant, in the same way as Aristotle would later compare an opponent of PNC who refused to say anything to a vegetable in *Metaphysics* Γ (250).⁹⁸ Lee's understanding of T12's metaphorical import sounds strained: a plant could hardly be depicted as *running away* and cannot speak *at all*, like the opponents of Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Γ and unlike Protagoras on his return in T12.⁹⁹ According to McCabe, the image is meant instead to express the doubt 'whether Protagoras – who has Heraclitean leanings – could persist long enough, or with enough concreteness, to engage in conversation' and defend himself (2000: 47). I do not see, however, any generic question of personal identity at stake here; on the contrary, a direct link seems to be implied between what Protagoras says and *his* following retreat (Protagoras does not 'dissolve' while rushing off). Ford argues that Protagoras' only possible reply is to simply restate his *kephalaion*, the 'head statement' of his book: 'Protagoras' head... runs off because it will still survive as a kind of *phēmē* (saying). Dismissed but

⁹⁷ For similar views concerning the dire consequences of qualifying MD as true only for Protagoras cf. the literature listed on p. 54n75.

⁹⁸ Cf. chapter 5, section 4.

⁹⁹ Other commentators do not try to conjecture what Protagoras' rejoinder might have been, but suppose that Protagoras rushes off because he has no good point to make (cf. e.g. Cornford 1935: 80, Polansky 1992: 132, Emilsson 1994: 144n14 and Lee 2005: 56, who speaks of 'sterile stubbornness'). McDowell (1973: 171) suggests that the image of Protagoras' return could indicate that Plato is not content with his argument (possibly because of the unwarranted drop of qualifiers). Nancy (1986: 81) too believes that the image indicates Plato's dissatisfaction with his argument, but for different reasons (cf. p. 65n104).

not obliterated, the dead thinker's saying is so well known, even notorious, that it is likely to pop up elsewhere among others interested in philosophy, and vex them with the same difficult words' (1994: 204–5). Ford's reading also ignores the crucial detail that Protagoras' head is supposed to *attack* Socrates and Theodorus, and not simply to restate MD.

I suggest that we adopt a more literal interpretation of T12: by accusing and trying to refute (ἐλέγξας) Socrates, presumably protesting that his self-refutation argument was unsound,¹⁰⁰ Protagoras is at the same time *refuting himself*, because his MD is inconsistent with the possibility of someone being mistaken and someone else proving him wrong.¹⁰¹ Protagoras is trying to do (it does not matter whether successfully or not) something which, according to his own illustrious doctrine, is impossible, thus betraying the fact that he himself, at the end of the day, does not really believe and 'live' his MD. Protagoras does not choose to rush off, but must rush off: on my reading his ducking and retreat to where he had come from should be interpreted as the metaphorical counterpart of the further self-refutation which he involuntarily incurs by attacking Socrates' self-refutation argument.¹⁰²

Socrates had previously remarked that MD was incompatible with dialectic and refutation,¹⁰³ just as it was incompatible with teaching, at least as ordinarily intended (161d7–e3), because by denying the possibility of falsehood and error it denies the very reasons for debating, establishing that your position is correct and your adversary's wrong:

T13 I say nothing about myself and my art of midwifery, and how much ridicule we incur; and I think the same goes for the whole business of dialectic (δισαλέγεσθαι). For mustn't it be a long and enormous nonsense to examine and try to refute (ἐλέγχειν) one another's appearances and judgements, when everyone's are correct if Protagoras' *Truth* is true...?¹⁰⁴ (161e4–162a2)

¹⁰⁰ The same kind of complaint had already been voiced, not without irony, at 166a–c, where Protagoras had lamented Socrates' use of unfair verbal traps (cf. p. 43). Protagoras' return from the dead had been foreshadowed at 169c8–d1.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Waterlow 1977: 28–9, Gortlieb 1992: 190. A similar interpretation is proposed but discarded by Burnyeat (1976b: 191).

¹⁰² For an alternative reading of Protagoras' rushing off, cf. 179e3–180c5, where the Heracliteans are depicted as people in *perennial movement* (cf. part II, chapter 13, section 2).

¹⁰³ A point nicely stressed by Long 2004.

¹⁰⁴ τὸ δὲ δὴ ἐμὸν τε καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς τέχνης τῆς μαιευτικῆς σιγῶ ὅσον γέλωτα ὀφλισκάνομεν, οἶμαι δὲ καὶ σύμπασα ἢ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι πραγματεία. τὸ γὰρ ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖν ἐλέγχειν τὰς ἀλλήλων φαντασίας τε καὶ δόξας, ὁρθὰς ἐκάστου οὐσας, οὐ μακρὰ μὲν καὶ διωλύγιος φλυαρία, εἰ ἀληθὴς ἢ Ἀλήθεια Πρωταγόρου...;

Socrates fails to consider here the possibility that Protagoras is practising a radically different form of dialectic, a 'therapeutic dialectic' in which the sophist argues to change his interlocutor's

It should come as no surprise then that MD is dialectically untenable: any attempt to defend it will result in an involuntary admission of its falsehood.¹⁰⁵ This makes T12, rather than T9, very similar to the *Euthydemus* passage we have analysed in section 4.1: the οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν thesis was considered self-refuting in a dialectical context because its defenders (Euthydemus and Dionysodorus) were obliged, by the very nature of that context, to try to overturn their opponents' arguments, thereby unwittingly overturning their own position, by implicitly conceding that false judgement and contradiction do exist. Both in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Euthydemus* it is absolutely immaterial whether Socrates' attacks are backed by sound arguments or poor reasoning:¹⁰⁶ as Socrates mockingly reminds us in T12, it is Protagoras himself who guarantees his adversaries the right of always saying whatever passes through their mind with no risk of refutation. In light of these considerations, Burnyeat's motivation for discarding the hypothesis that Socrates purposely begs the question against Protagoras by omitting the qualifiers (p. 47) becomes inconclusive: by such a move Socrates would not be displaying 'perverse dishonesty', but showing how weak Protagoras' MD turns out to be as soon as it is submitted to dialectical scrutiny.¹⁰⁷ Either Protagoras remains silent,¹⁰⁸ or he angrily protests that Socrates is misrepresenting his doctrine and proposing an incorrect refutation, thus depriving Socrates of the status of measure concerning both the exegesis of MD and logical soundness, and contradicting MD itself.¹⁰⁹ In either case, Protagoras is a loser, because he cannot 'downthrow' adversaries and arguments which anyone else could have charged with 'perverse

beliefs not from false to true, but from harmful to beneficial (cf. p. 43). According to Nancy (1986: 80–1, 1995: 93–100) the self-refutation argument is weak and 'eristic' exactly because of this failure. As Chappell (2005: 115) notices, however, 'this retort seems to make the wise man's expertise consist in *predictive* power; and there is a question whether Protagoreanism is consistent with the existence of predictive powers', as powerfully argued later in the *Theaetetus* (171e–172b; 177d–179b).

¹⁰⁵ On the difficulty for someone like Protagoras to engage in meaningful dialectic cf. also Wardy 2006: 99–100.

¹⁰⁶ Just as it is immaterial whether Protagoras' and Dionysodorus' responses really undermine Socrates' arguments or only purport to undermine them.

¹⁰⁷ As Waterlow (1977: 36) puts it, Protagoras turns out to be, 'so to speak, a dialectical nothing'.

¹⁰⁸ As Gottlieb (1992: 190–1) remarks, if Protagoras 'admits that his opponents have got his view right, then his own theory must be nothing in itself, but subject to the same indeterminacy and flux which Plato argues characterize Protagoras' world'.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. the dialectical manoeuvre described by Aristotle at *SE* 15, 174a20–3, in a chapter in which he lists various methods which help sophistical arguers to refute their interlocutors more easily: 'Moreover, there are anger and contentiousness, for when agitated everybody is less able to be on his guard; to make it clear that one wishes to be unfair and to be completely shameless are elements conducive to anger' (ἐπι δ' ὀργή καὶ φιλονεικία: ταραττόμενοι γὰρ ἦττον δύνανται φυλάττεσθαι πάντες: στοιχεῖα δὲ τῆς ὀργῆς τὸ τε φανερόν ἐαυτὸν ποιεῖν βουλομένων ἀδικεῖν καὶ τὸ παράπαν ἀναίχυντεῖν).

dishonesty'.¹¹⁰ Even an apparently shameless move would thus establish a powerful philosophical point; although I have provided a reconstruction in which Socrates' argument does not rely on the absence of qualifiers, one might suppose that Plato's undeniable ambiguity, in particular in the elliptical T7, was deliberate.¹¹¹ Also an irrelevant charge can be lethal for someone endorsing Protagoras' position.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ It is then quite ironic that Protagoras' *Truth* came to be known in antiquity also under the title *The Downthrowers* (cf. p. 36n16). The use of the wrestling metaphor for dialectical argumentation is widespread also in the *Theaetetus* (cf. e.g. 162b, 166b1, 167e6, 169a–b and Herrmann 1995).

¹¹¹ Along these lines, one might even argue that Socrates insisted that Theodorus participated, in place of Theaetetus, in the examination of MD (168c–169c) because he counted on the fact that Theodorus, unlike the philosophically more gifted Theaetetus, would fail to notice the fallacious drop of the qualifiers, thus compelling Protagoras to return and defend himself *in propria persona*, with the disastrous consequences just explained (*contra* Nancy 1995: 96). Notice that Theaetetus had already been made aware of the importance of dealing carefully with qualifiers in his discussion of previous objections to Protagoras (cf. p. 47n50), especially at 165b–c. For the related but in my opinion inconclusive suggestion that the relativisers are tacitly dropped in the self-refutation argument because Theodorus is Socrates' interlocutor, and 'a sober mathematician would be the last person we would expect to take exception to the use of unrelativised terms' cf. Long 2004: 36.

¹¹² Zilioli (2007: 134–40) has recently argued that Protagoras' brand of relativism is immune from the self-refutation charge, which question-beggingly foists upon Protagoras an objectivist notion of truth. I shall not discuss Zilioli's arguments, since they fail to address the details of Plato's own argument in T9. In this context, however, it is interesting to signal Zilioli's surprising approval of the following argument from Sextus Empiricus as sound support for his contention that 'if relativism can be consistently charged to be self-refuting, on similar grounds the same charge will consistently be levelled against objectivism' (140):

καὶ μαρτυρεῖν φαίνεται τούτῳ ὁ ἀντικείμενος λόγος. εἰ γὰρ φήσῃ σοὶ τις μὴ πάντων τῶν πραγμάτων κριτήριον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, βεβαιώσει τὸ πάντων τῶν πραγμάτων κριτήριον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον: αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ τοῦτο λέγων ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν, καὶ τὸ ὡς πρὸς αὐτὸν τιθεῖς φαινόμενον ὁμολογεῖ καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο τῶν ὡς πρὸς αὐτὸν φαινόμενων ὑπάρχειν.

And to this [*sc.* Protagoras' MD] even the opposing thesis appears to bear witness. For if someone will tell you that man is not the criterion of all things, he will confirm that man is the criterion of all things: for he who says this is himself a man, and in affirming what appears in relation to himself he admits that this very thing too is one of those which appear in relation to him. (*SE*. *M* 7.61: I retain the MSS reading, following Bett 2005: 14; Mutschmann (1914) adds the word κριτήριον before τὸ ὡς πρὸς αὐτὸν τιθεῖς φαινόμενον).

This argument is, on a charitable interpretation, a half-hearted *parody* of a 'convertible argument' (cf. p. 15n10) applied to self-refutation, and a specimen of poor logic otherwise: the mere fact that the opponent of MD is expressing what appears to him, like anyone else does (usually you assert that *p* if you believe *p* to be true), does not doom him to self-refutation, since clearly he is not arguing that his denial of MD is true (and should be accepted by Protagoras) *because* he believes it to be true. Even if one agrees that the self-refutation argument begs the question against relativism at some point, certainly it does not do so by attributing to the relativist the foolish idea that relativism must be accepted because it is an absolute truth. Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the self-refutation argument against relativism may be – and these should be carefully assessed case by case on the basis of the precise formulation of the argument and of the form of relativism in the dock – it seems impossible to dismiss it on the basis that objectivism is liable to some analogous self-refutation charge.

CHAPTER 5

Speaking to Antiphrasis: Aristotle

The most conspicuous feature of Aristotle's attitude towards the self-refutation argument is probably the scarce interest he appears to show in it, both in comparison with his great teacher and in absolute terms. As far as I have been able to ascertain, in nearly 1,500 Bekker pages of extant Aristotelian Greek prose, often stuffed with dense argumentation, only a handful of promising candidates for the role of self-refutation arguments present themselves. Not only does Aristotle not possess any technical label for self-refutation, just as Plato did not; apart from one significant exception, even when he does use the self-refutation argument, he fails to highlight his use or to emphasise the particular nature of the argument itself, unlike Plato. In the next three sections I shall analyse some Aristotelian self-refutation arguments directed against positions which are relevant to our current inquiry; in section 5.4 I shall re-examine a couple of passages which, I believe, have been catalogued too hastily as Aristotelian self-refutation charges.

5.1 SELF-REFUTATION AND BEGGING THE QUESTION (METAPH. Γ 4, 1008A27–30)

Within the war which Aristotle wages in *Metaphysics* Γ against the deniers of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC) and cognate principles¹ (to designate collectively these deniers I shall use the handy label 'Antiphrasis', following Dancy 1975), starting from 1007b18 the focus shifts to the extreme thesis that 'contradictories are all simultaneously true of the same thing',

¹ Besides the literature to which I shall refer in the rest of the chapter, for in-depth discussion of Aristotle's views on contradiction, PNC and related principles cf. Cavini 2007 and 2008.

i.e. 'anything affirmed may also be denied' and 'anything denied may also be affirmed' (1008a12–13):²

$$(1) (\forall x)(\forall P) Px \leftrightarrow \neg Px^3$$

Having argued that the thesis commits its supporters to the view that 'everything is one'⁴ (1007b18–1008a2) and to a breakdown of the Principle of Excluded Middle (1008a2–7), Aristotle considers whether, according to (1), one could truly state the two members of the contradictory pair separately, or only in conjunction. For example, assuming the truth of the contradiction 'Socrates is pale and not pale', could its first conjunct, 'Socrates is pale', be truly affirmed in isolation as well, or not? Aristotle argues that in either case unacceptable consequences would follow, starting from the unwelcome consequences of the first option:

114 Similarly, even if it is possible to say the truth by separating <the affirmation and the negation>, it follows . . . that (a) everyone will say the truth and everyone will say the false, and (b) he [*sc.* Antiphrasis] himself admits (ὁμολογεῖ) that he is saying something false.⁵ (Γ 4, 1008a27–30)

Let us first consider consequence (a). Why if, for any predicate *P* and any thing *x*, one could truly affirm *Px* and truly deny it (i.e. truly assert $\neg Px$), would everyone then say the truth and at the same time say the false? Would not everyone simply say the truth? Aristotle must be tacitly applying here the basic semantic principle according to which whenever an affirmation is true the corresponding negation must be false, and vice versa:

$$(2) (\forall x)(\forall P)(TPx \leftrightarrow F\neg Px)^6$$

Suppose that both '*n* is *P*' and '*n* is not *P*' are separately true; *Pn* will be true, by hypothesis, and at the same time false, because of (2) and the truth

² καθ' ὅσον τὸ φῆσαι καὶ ἀποφῆσαι καὶ καθ' ὅσον ἀποφῆσαι καὶ φῆσαι.

³ (1), together with the Principle of Excluded Middle, entails $(\forall x)(\forall P)(Px \wedge \neg Px)$, i.e. the *contrary* of PNC (what in modern jargon could be called 'trivialism', i.e. the view that all contradictions are true, as opposed to 'dialetheism', i.e. the view that some contradictions are true). For discussion of this 'curious turn' in the argument of Γ (from the contradictory to the contrary of PNC) cf. Wedin 2003; for a problematic attempt to individuate historical proponents of dialetheism in antiquity (Heraclitus, Protagoras, Antisthenes, Eubulides) cf. Priest and Routley 1989: 3–15.

It is well-known that Aristotelian negations do not operate on propositions: I adopt the notation $\neg Px$ for convenience, since in this case it does not produce misleading results ($Px = 'x$ is *P*', '*P* belongs to *x*'; $\neg Px = 'x$ is not *P*', '*P* does not belong to *x*').

⁴ This could be read as a sort of reduction of Heraclitus' position to Parmenides' (cf. part II, chapter 13).

⁵ ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ εἰ διαίρουντα ἐνδέχεται ἀληθεύειν, συμβαίνει . . . ὅτι πάντες ἂν ἀληθεύοιεν καὶ πάντες ἂν ψεύδοιντο, καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ὁμολογεῖ ψεύδεσθαι.

⁶ I treat 'true' and 'false' here as predicates of affirmations and denials.

of its contradictory, $\neg Pn$. On the basis of this simple reasoning, it is easy to see that if 'the contradictories are all simultaneously true of the same thing' whatever one can say will be both true *and* false, and thus everyone will be both right and wrong about everything. (2), which is the real, albeit implicit, pivot of Aristotle's argument in T14(a), looks unimpeachable: far from being a contentious principle, it can be described as a corollary of the classical definition of (saying the) true and (saying the) false which Aristotle himself will provide a few pages below in Γ 7:

T15 For to say that that which is is not or that which is not is, is false; and <to say that> that which is is and that which is not is not, is true.⁷ (1011b26–7)

If Pn is true, it must be so because it says that n , which is P , is P ; but then $\neg Pn$ must be false, since it says that n , which is P , is not P .⁸

However unproblematic (2) might be in itself, though, Aristotle's use of it could be questioned in this context.⁹ One who supposes that all contradictories are simultaneously true, like our Antiphrasis here, is thereby likely to be asking us, if only implicitly, to ditch a principle like (2). Otherwise, it would have been reasonable for him to claim that all affirmations and negations are at the same time true and false, and charity demands that we attribute to him a position which is at least properly articulated. Given what I have just explained about the intimate link between (2) and Aristotle's account of true and false in T15, we must suppose that Antiphrasis is also asking us to revise radically our (for him) misguided conception of these notions. One might then protest that (2) cannot be tacitly presupposed in

⁷ τὸ μὲν γὰρ λέγειν τὸ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ τὸ ὄν εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές.

⁸ As Walter Cavini has suggested to me, one might object that, if taken literally, T15 actually expresses only sufficient conditions for (saying the) true and (saying the) false, which can be translated into the rules of 'semantic ascent'

$$\begin{array}{ll} Pn \rightarrow TPn & \neg Pn \rightarrow T\neg Pn \\ Pn \rightarrow F\neg Pn & \neg Pn \rightarrow FPn \end{array}$$

and not necessary and sufficient conditions (i.e. equivalences), so it does not provide, strictly speaking, a definition at all. The corresponding rules of 'semantic descent'

$$\begin{array}{ll} TPn \rightarrow Pn & T\neg Pn \rightarrow \neg Pn \\ FPn \rightarrow \neg Pn & F\neg Pn \rightarrow Pn \end{array}$$

(and hence the equivalences) can be extracted only from *Cat.* 12, 14b15–20. It should be noticed, however, that at *Metaph.* Γ 8, 1012b5–11 Aristotle himself seems to treat a variant of (2) as fully equivalent to his previous account of 'what "false" and "true" signify'. For detailed analysis of T15 with extensive bibliographical references cf. Crivelli 2004b, 132–6. For a clear Platonic antecedent of T15 cf. *Crat.* 385b7–8; for Epicurean and Stoic analogous analyses cf. S.E. *M* 8.9–10.

⁹ For insightful discussion of various ways in which (2), the rules mentioned in n. 8 above and analogous 'principles of deflation' could be rejected by someone who denies the Principle of Bivalence cf. Barnes 2007a, chapter 1.

any argument against him, in so far as such an argument aims at being *dialectical* (as T14's final clause αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ὁμολογεῖ ψεῦδεσθαι indicates), and thus the opponent's defeat should be a consequence of views upon which he has agreed or would certainly agree if asked. According to this line of defence, Aristotle might be countercharged with begging the question against Antiphrasis and, even worse, of allowing his *petitio principii* to sneak unnoticed into his argument in the form of (2), without clarifying the basic presuppositions on which his argument relies.

An incidental remark he makes only a few lines below T14 testifies to the fact that Aristotle could hardly have failed to be aware of such a possible rejoinder:

T16 If whenever the affirmation is true the negation is false, and when the latter is true the affirmation is false, there can be no such thing as truly affirming and denying the same thing at the same time. But they would probably claim that this is the issue originally posed.¹⁰ (Γ 4, 1008a34–b2)

Here Aristotle formulates the principle which I have labelled (2), and claims that we can infer from it that it is impossible to affirm and deny truly the same thing at the same time (i.e. that (1) is false).¹¹ However, he comments that Antiphrasis would probably reject the argument and complain that it begs the question, because (2), in a sense, is nothing else than what Aristotle posed as the thesis he wanted to defend (ultimately, PNC itself). To be precise, Aristotle does not admit that Antiphrasis' complaint would be justified,¹² and subsequently shows no qualms about arguing, in a similar vein, for the Principle of Excluded Middle starting from T15's account

¹⁰ ἔτι εἰ ὅταν ἡ φάσις ἀληθὴς ᾖ, ἡ ἀπόφασις ψευδὴς, καὶ αὐτὴ ἀληθὴς ᾖ, ἡ κατάφασις ψευδὴς, οὐκ ἂν εἴη τὸ αὐτὸ ἅμα φάναι καὶ ἀποφάναι ἀληθῶς. ἀλλ' ἴσως φαίεν ἂν τοῦτ' εἶναι τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς κείμενον.

¹¹ I do not see any reason for interpreting T16 as presenting an indirect argument, along the lines of Wedin's proposal (2000: 160–1): if PNC were false, then (2) would be false, but this is 'absurd or awkward' ('calls for "shrieking"' in Wedin's words), and thus the denial of PNC is absurd or awkward too. I see even less reason for claiming that in T16 Aristotle is arguing that 'the argument may be self-refuting' (159) or 'self-defeating' (162) (where 'the argument' is, I suppose, Antiphrasis' denial of PNC).

¹² The following passage from the *Prior Analytics* (2.16, 64b34–8) might suggest that an attempt to demonstrate a first principle 'through itself' is *not* question begging (although of course it is not a genuine demonstration either, since of the first principles there can be no demonstration): 'But since some things are naturally known through themselves, and other things through something else (the principles through themselves, what is subordinate to the principles through something else), whenever someone tries to prove through itself what is not known through itself he begs the original question at issue' (ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ τὰ μὲν δι' αὐτῶν πέφυκε γνωρίζεσθαι τὰ δὲ δι' ἄλλων (αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀρχαὶ δι' αὐτῶν, τὰ δ' ὑπὸ τὰς ἀρχὰς δι' ἄλλων), ὅταν μὴ τὸ δι' αὐτοῦ γνωστὸν δι' αὐτοῦ τις ἐπιχειρῇ δεικνύναι, τότ' αἰτεῖται τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς).

of true and false (Γ 7, 1011b23–9)¹³ and against the thesis that everything is false starting from a variant of (2) (Γ 8, 1012b5–11).¹⁴ We should not forget, however, that the concern to avoid begging the question against Antiphrasis (or at least to avoid appearing to do so) by choosing a particular strategy, the ‘elenctic proof’, immune to this charge (cf. section 5.4.2 below), was a priority in Aristotle’s agenda from the very beginning of Γ 4. Aristotle’s tacit reliance on (2) in T14 to draw consequence (a) would seem liable to the same type of charge as his explicit assumption of it as a premiss in T16 (or at least to some analogous charge).¹⁵ The fact that, to my knowledge, other than Alexander of Aphrodisias no commentator noticed Aristotle’s tacit, and possibly question-begging, manoeuvre in T14¹⁶ shows how difficult it can be to identify certain unstated assumptions or principles when these are so deeply rooted in our ordinary practice of inference, and actually constitutive of it. These are background assumptions or principles which normally we do not make explicit and we do not challenge, but in *Metaphysics* Γ it is assumptions and principles of just this kind, and their consequences, that face Antiphrasis’ assault. What is not question-begging in other contexts, then, risks becoming so here.

¹³ ‘There cannot be an intermediate between contradictories, but of one subject we must either affirm or deny any one predicate. This is clear, in the first place, if we define what the true and the false are (δῆλον δὲ πρῶτον μὲν ὁρισσάμενοις τί τὸ ἀληθὲς καὶ ψεῦδος),’ after which T15’s ‘definitions’ occur (on this passage cf. Cavini 1998).

¹⁴ ‘But against all such arguments we must postulate, as we said above, not that something is or is not, but that people mean something, so that we must argue from a definition, assuming what the false or the true mean (λαβόντας τί σημαίνει τὸ ψεῦδος ἢ τὸ ἀληθές). If that which is true to affirm is nothing other than that which is false to deny, it is impossible that all statements should be false; for one side of the contradiction must be true.’

¹⁵ These apparently different attitudes towards the risk of begging the question (or appearing to beg the question) might depend on the different degrees of similarity between the disguised question-begging premiss and the conclusion, on the presence and number of additional premisses involved, and on the number of deductive steps needed to ‘remove the disguise’ (cf. Dancy 1975: 20). For Aristotle’s various views on begging the question cf. *Top.* 8.13; *SE* 5, 6, 27; *APr.* 2.16 (see also Robinson 1971, Woods and Walton 1982, Schreiber 2003: 98–106, Castagnoli unpub.). There is the further complication here that, according to Aristotle’s strictly dialectical account in the *Topics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*, a questioner is guilty of begging the question whenever he explicitly asks to concede a question-begging premiss and even if the answerer does grant it, i.e. just in virtue of asking and using a question-begging premiss (in fact on that account there is nothing like implicit question-begging, which would explain why the argument in T14, unlike the one in T16, is not said to be liable to the charge of begging the question). In the more ordinary way in which I have used the expression so far (a way which seems to be in tune with Aristotle’s use in the *Metaphysics*), Aristotle would be begging the question against Antiphrasis by using a premiss which Antiphrasis would never grant if asked and which is ‘very close’ (in some sense to be further clarified) to the conclusion he wants to establish.

¹⁶ Alexander, commenting on T16, remarks that Aristotle ‘has implicitly used this argument already, when he said that all were in error’ (in *Metaph.* 297, 11), clearly referring to T14.

Also T14(b), which can be described as Antiphrasis’ self-refutation consisting in the admission that his own thesis is false, crucially relies on the tacit application of (2). First, the supporter of the thesis (1), that whenever an affirmation is true the corresponding negation is also true, will be forced to agree that the negation of his affirmative thesis, namely ‘Contradictories are not both true at the same time’, must be true as well, in virtue of his own thesis (1).¹⁷ But then, as Alexander remarks,

T17 by his own admission that the negation of the affirmation which he himself posited, which says that contradictories are both true at the same time, is true, he admits that he himself is saying something false (αὐτὸν ὁμολογεῖ ψεύδεσθαι).¹⁸ (in *Metaph.* 296, 19–21)

The final step of the argument is not the self-application of Antiphrasis’ thesis; it relies, once again, on the application of (2) to the result of that self-application. In the absence of this extra step, Antiphrasis, who is committed at this stage of the discussion to the contrary of PNC, could be ‘only’ led to admit the truth of PNC too; he could thus be accused of having omitted some relevant truth,¹⁹ but not of having affirmed something he himself must admit to be false.²⁰

Merely emphasising that Antiphrasis, the champion of contradiction, is committed to contradictory positions about PNC itself is not necessarily a knock-out blow. Similarly, it would certainly be question-begging to try to establish the absolute truth of PNC by *reductio ad contradictionem*, i.e. by showing that its denial entails a contradiction and must thereby be rejected as a logical falsehood. How can you refute someone like Antiphrasis then? Lear (1980: 113) noticed that Aristotle’s arguments in *Metaphysics* Γ are

constructed so as to reveal *to us* that Aristotle’s opponent is in a contradictory position. Prima facie it might appear that the revelation that one is in a contradictory position would hardly be felt as damaging to the opponent of the law of non-contradiction. But Aristotle is not trying to persuade him [*sc.* Antiphrasis]: the argument is for our sake, not for his.

¹⁷ Aristotle does not take into account here the possibility that Antiphrasis might want to exempt his higher-order generalisation from self-application (‘whenever the affirmation is true the negation is also true, except for this very affirmation, whose negation alone is not true’). For Aristotle’s awareness of the possibility of such a move cf. the end of section 5.2.

¹⁸ ἐν τῷ αὐτῇ ὁμολογεῖν ἀληθῆ εἶναι τὴν ἀναίρετικὴν οὖσαν ἧς αὐτὸς ἐτίθετο καταφάσεως τῆς λεγομένης τὴν ἀντίφασιν ἅμα εἶναι ἀληθῆ, αὐτὸν ὁμολογεῖ ψεύδεσθαι.

¹⁹ ‘If you must admit that PNC is no less true than your own denial of it, why don’t you propose and defend it too?’, one might object. To such an objection Antiphrasis could still reply as follows: ‘I omitted to propound and defend PNC because, unlike its denial, it is something which is already so widely accepted, as you yourself suggest, that it does not need to be advocated by me, you or anyone else.’

²⁰ *Contra* Lear 1980: 112: ‘The opponent of the law of non-contradiction (if he is consistent) must admit not only that what he says is true, but also that what he says is in error’.

While agreeing on the essence of this comment, I believe Lear overlooks two non-trivial details. First, Aristotle believes that some of PNC's opponents can and must be persuaded: those who deny PNC as a result of philosophical confusion, some intellectual cramp caused, for example, by the observation of the flux of perceptibles or conflicting appearances, can be reformed, and doubtless a way of achieving this purpose is to spell out fully all the bizarre consequences of their denial which they might have overlooked (Γ 5, 1009a17–20).²¹ Perhaps the twofold consequence of T14 is not the most disturbing within Aristotle's overall enterprise of *Metaphysics* Γ 4–8, but it could still contribute something towards this 'pedagogical' aim. Second, Lear undervalues the specific force of the admission that one's position is false or incorrect. The fact that Antiphrasis should be ready to accept contradiction does not automatically imply that he will be happy to grant that his view is *false*. The extra step taken by Aristotle in T14 thanks to his tacit application of (2) is not an unimportant extra turn of the screw: admitting that you are in error is much more embarrassing than admitting that your adversary is right too, and so much more so if you are a character like Antiphrasis, whose position has already been assimilated to that of Protagoras at the beginning of Γ 5 and whose denial of PNC could therefore be read as a companion to the now familiar theses that everything is true and falsehood and error are impossible.

This is why Aristotle's strategy in T14 is, at the end of the day, less straightforward and much more subtle than it might appear: this is a peculiar case in which forcing your adversary to concede the contradictory of his own thesis is not a clear-cut dialectical triumph, and Antiphrasis' more compromising confession 'I am wrong' (ψεύδομαι) seems to be extorted by relying, surreptitiously, on a principle which he would surely reject.²²

But at what cost? Could Antiphrasis be so bold as to complain that Aristotle is guilty of *petitio principii* by using (2), and refuse to grant it? So far I have played devil's advocate, and assumed he could. As I have already noted, however, by rejecting (2) Antiphrasis would be also rejecting, ultimately, that commonsense conception of truth and falsehood which is conveyed, for example, in T15. If, on the one hand, Aristotle risks begging the question in his struggle with Antiphrasis, then, Antiphrasis, on the other, could be charged with *changing the subject* if he stubbornly refused to grant at least some minimal features of our (and Aristotle's) ordinary semantic notions. Of course he is free to provide a radically alternative account of

²¹ Cf. also κ 5, 1062a31–5 (see the beginning of section 5.3 below).

²² For a similar line of criticism cf. Priest 2005: 37.

truth and falsehood; however, any such account must be at least intelligible, and cannot be so different from ours as to obscure the fact that he is trying to provide an extremely revisionary account of those very things which we call 'truth' and 'falsehood'.²³ Even when it is unmasked, Aristotle's fishy manoeuvre in T14 succeeds in revealing (to us and to Antiphrasis) what someone like Antiphrasis should give up in order to cling to his position, what price he should be ready to pay for defying and abandoning orthodoxy. But suppose Antiphrasis took up the gauntlet, and rejected (2), proposing an alternative account of truth and falsehood to go with this rejection; even then his own thesis (1) would force him to grant the affirmation corresponding to his denial of (2), i.e. to accept (2) itself, since 'anything denied may equally be affirmed'. In fact, there is no premiss, implicit or explicit, that Antiphrasis can reject in Aristotle's argument (cf. Protagoras' analogous quandary at the end of section 2 of chapter 4).

Does Aristotle tacitly avail himself of (2) in T14 because he is confident that Antiphrasis could hardly dare to reject it (and that, even if he tried, he would fail)? Given Aristotle's caution in T16, we cannot exclude the possibility that he himself overlooked some of the complexity of the issue, or simply hoped his objectionable move would pass unnoticed (as in fact happened). However, this does not mean that Antiphrasis emerges in good shape from T14's twofold attack: his only possible line of defence would make his thesis even more unpalatable, by forcing him to uncover and spell out certain consequences of his stance on truth and falsehood which make it border on unintelligibility. Moreover, as soon as pressed only a little further, even this line of defence would seem to collapse.

5.2 'EVERYTHING IS TRUE', 'EVERYTHING IS FALSE': THE SELF-ELIMINATION 'STOCK OBJECTION' (METAPH. Γ 8, 1012B13–22)

Aristotle's most manifest adoption of the self-refutation charge against Antiphrasis occurs towards the end of *Metaphysics* Γ:

²³ Notice that the thesis (1) under fire in T14 could be attacked along the same lines as 'Everything is true', and along those lines one could argue that Antiphrasis is committed to admit its falsehood, without any need to presuppose (2): if, for any pair of affirmations and negations, both of them are true, then one must also concede the truth of 'It is false that, for any pair of affirmations and negations, both of them are true' (and thus the falsehood of 'For any pair of affirmations and negations, both of them are true'). Unlike the argument in T14, such an argument would exploit the general fact that, if (1) were true, every affirmation would be true, and not the specific point that *pairs* of affirmations and negations would be true. To escape such an argument Antiphrasis ought to abandon another crucial piece of our notion of truth, namely the law of 'semantic descent' $Tp \rightarrow p$.

τ18 Indeed all such theses (λόγοις) are exposed to the stock objection (τὸ θρυλούμενον) that they eliminate themselves (αὐτοὺς ἑαυτοὺς ἀναίρειν). For (a) anyone who says that everything is true also makes the thesis opposite to his own true (ὁ μὲν γὰρ πάντα ἀληθῆ λέγων καὶ τὸν ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ λόγον ἀληθῆ ποιεῖ), so that his own is not true (for the opposite thesis denies that his is true), and (b) anyone who says that everything is false also <belies> himself. And (c) if they make exceptions – the former that only the opposite <of his own thesis> is not true, the latter that only his own is not false – they will end up nonetheless postulating an infinite number of theses, true and false; for he who says that the true thesis is true says something true, and this will go on to infinity.²⁴ (Γ 8, 1012b13–22)

Whereas τ14's consequence (b), which I have construed as a self-refutation charge in section 5.1 above, was not highlighted as such in any way, Aristotle refers to the strategy employed in τ18 as θρυλούμενον ('expressed over and over'), a 'stock objection', clearly hinting at its previous Platonic (and Democritean) history,²⁵ and describes its thrust in general terms: certain λόγοι²⁶ ('Everything is true' and 'Everything is false') 'eliminate' or 'destroy' (ἀναίρειν) themselves (or, more tragically, 'kill themselves', 'are suicidal'). Aristotle's use of θρυλούμενον captured Narcy's (1989: 81) attention:

Platon, corrélativement, n'est pas nommé: Aristote n'estime pas que la mention de cet argument mérite plus que l'anonymat du lieu commun. Le terme dont il le désigne, *to thruloumenon* (1012 b 14), s'inscrit, si l'on en croit P. Chantraine, dans le registre du bavardage... Cette façon de mentionner l'argument platonicien n'est pas à proprement parler invalidante: d'un tel lieu commun il peut à l'occasion être commode de se servir... et c'est pourquoi Aristote l'ajoute ici à son arsenal; mais elle est à coup sûr dépréciative. L'argument platonicien n'est rappelé que pour mémoire, en quelque sorte, moyen vulgaire de réfutation, qui ne saurait ajouter quoi que ce soit à celle qui vient de se conclure sur le rappel de son principe.

²⁴ συμβαίνει δὲ καὶ τὸ θρυλούμενον πᾶσι τοῖς τοιοῦτοις λόγοις, αὐτοὺς ἑαυτοὺς ἀναίρειν. ὁ μὲν γὰρ πάντα ἀληθῆ λέγων καὶ τὸν ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ λόγον ἀληθῆ ποιεῖ, ὥστε τὸν ἑαυτοῦ οὐκ ἀληθῆ (ὁ γὰρ ἐναντίος οὐ φησιν αὐτὸν ἀληθῆ), ὁ δὲ πάντα ψευδῆ καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτόν. ἔαν δ' ἐξαιρῶνται ὁ μὲν τὸν ἐναντίον ὡς οὐκ ἀληθὴς μόνος ἔσται, ὁ δὲ τὸν αὐτοῦ ὡς οὐ ψευδὴς, οὐδὲν ἦττον ἀπείρους συμβαίνει αὐτοῖς αἰτεῖσθαι λόγους ἀληθεῖς καὶ ψευδεῖς. ὁ γὰρ λέγων τὸν ἀληθῆ λόγον ἀληθῆ ἀληθὴς, τοῦτο δ' εἰς ἀπειρον βαδιέεται.

²⁵ According to Sextus Empiricus, Democritus and Plato used the self-refutation argument against Protagoras, and his words seem to imply that they were the first who used it. However, we cannot know for sure which of them devised it (cf. T23 on p. 95).

²⁶ Barnes's (1984: vol. II, 1598) translation of λόγοι as 'arguments' (Barnes's revision of Ross's 'views') is incorrect: as Aristotle's subsequent explanation clarifies, it is the *theses* 'Everything is true' and 'Everything is false' that incur self-refutation (pace also Cassin and Narcy 1989: 157: 'argumentations'; D'Agostini 2002: 17: 'ragionamento').

It is indisputable that Aristotle shows no special enthusiasm for the twofold self-refutation charge of τ18.²⁷ Certainly its position and role within the overall architecture of *Metaphysics* Γ appear to be peripheral when compared with other arguments, in particular with the celebrated 'elenctic proof' of PNC in Γ 4 (cf. section 5.4.2 below). The self-refutation argument indisputably plays a more crucial part in Plato's *Theaetetus*, but there too it does not occur in a climactic position and I have argued in chapter 4, section 2 that Plato himself, contrary to what is often supposed, does nothing to highlight it as 'especially clever'. I suggest that Aristotle's way of introducing τ18's arguments does not necessarily reflect a veiled criticism of Plato's strategy or, more generally, of the self-refutation argument itself.²⁸ To begin with, even if we understood θρυλούμενον in its most pejorative nuance ('babbled over and over'), which is by no means necessary given Aristotle's own usage of the term,²⁹ the fact that at the time in which Aristotle wrote *Metaphysics* Γ 8 the self-refutation objection seemed quite trite does not imply that he considered the achievement of those who first devised and used it trivial, or the force of the objection itself questionable. More importantly, calling an argument 'commonplace' and then going on to deploy it successfully and show that it thoroughly defeats one's opponent is not so much a way of devaluing the argument itself as a way of increasing the humiliation of the opponent in question. If your thesis is so weak that even a hackneyed argument is sufficient to subvert it, then your defeat is certainly more clear-cut and shameful than it would be if an ingenious, and possibly controversial, refutation were needed to beat you: 'At least since the time of Democritus and Plato everyone knows that certain theses are hopelessly suicidal, and you still wander around trying to sell them to us?' From a rhetorical point of view, Aristotle's choice of θρυλούμενον is no less effective a blow than the argument itself which he thus labels.

So far I have discussed some clues to the Aristotelian attitude towards self-refutation arguments emerging from τ18; but what can τ18 teach us about the logic of Aristotelian self-refutation? Once again, what are subject to self-elimination do not seem to be abstract propositions, but statements (λόγοις) along with their proponents (ὁ λέγων), which is in tune with what we have observed in the case of previous self-refutation arguments. In argument (a) Aristotle is not claiming that if everything were true

²⁷ Cf. also Wedin (2005: 172), who speaks of Aristotle's 'less sanguine attitude [sc. than Plato's] about the prospects' for self-refutation arguments.

²⁸ *Contra* also Cassin 1993: 535.

²⁹ Cf. *Ath.* 16.7.4; *HA* 9.13, 615b24; 9.37, 620b11; *GA* 3.5, 756b6; *Metaph.* M 1, 1076a28; *Rhet.* 2.21, 1395a10; 3.7, 1408b2; 3.14, 1415a2.

then it would also be true that it is false that everything is true and, *therefore*, 'Everything is true' must be false: the final, crucial inference from $(p \rightarrow \neg p)$ to $\neg p$ is missing, but it is this extra inference that would be required to have a formal refutation of Antiphrasis' thesis by *Consequentia Mirabilis*.³⁰ Aristotle's reference to the asserter of the thesis that everything is true would be irrelevant if his aim were to prove something about its propositional content independently of that assertion. What Aristotle claims is that whoever *says* that everything is true *makes* the opposite of his thesis true *too*: since asserting something is not a sufficient condition for making it true (except for a few special cases which are not at stake presently),³¹ Aristotle must mean that whoever asserts that everything is true is thereby *committing himself* also to the truth of the opposite of his own thesis,³² and thus can be forced to admit the falsehood of his own ('so that his own is not true'). The nature of the argument as a purely dialectical 'silencer' of Antiphrasis is confirmed by the case of 'Everything is false' in T18(b): he who says that everything is false 'also belies himself' or 'makes himself also false', i.e. unwittingly *concedes*, by self-application,³³ that what he is saying must be false too (again, the further and different conclusion 'therefore, it is false that everything is false' is missing). That proposal is thus self-defeating and suicidal: this is all that Aristotle seems to be interested in establishing through the self-refutation 'stock objection'. This is not to suggest that Aristotle did not believe that – to use our terms – the propositions 'Everything is true' and 'Everything is false' are false, or that he excluded that he could prove (at least in some weak, non-apodeictic sense of 'proving') their falsehood;³⁴ I am only emphasising that this is not what T18 purports to establish. This is a welcome discovery, since, as we have learnt in chapter 1, without first considering what the truth-bearers are and what their truth-value is,³⁵ all one might prove is that 'Everything is false' is either false or Liar-paradoxical.

³⁰ Pace D'Agostini 2002: 17. On *Consequentia Mirabilis* cf. section 1 of chapter 6, where I shall also argue that this argument pattern might have been unavailable to Aristotle.

³¹ Cf. self-verifying performatives such as the assertions 'I can speak' or 'I am saying something'.

³² It is not clear whether the 'opposite' (ἐναντίον) of 'Everything is true' is supposed to be 'Something is false' (the contradictory), 'Everything is false' (the contrary), or, more probably, given Aristotle's own wording, 'It is not true that everything is true'.

³³ From this point of view, the present argument differs from Mackie's self-refutation of 'Nothing is true' based on T-prefixability (cf. chapter 2). De Praetere (1993: 356) misinterprets Aristotle's argument, making it similar to Mackie's: to one maintaining that 'Nothing is true' 'it is easy to answer that at least one thing is true, i.e. that nothing is true'.

³⁴ Cf. e.g. *Metaph.* Γ 8, 1012b5–11, in which Aristotle concludes that it is impossible that everything is false starting from a corollary of his definition of truth and falsehood (cf. p. 72n14).

³⁵ For detailed discussion of Aristotle's complex position on the bearers of truth and falsehood (including, among the others, sentence-tokens, thought-tokens, and perhaps states of affairs and sentence-types) cf. Nuchelmans 1973: 23–44 and Crivelli 2004b: 45–76.

One final noteworthy aspect is Aristotle's mention and criticism in T18(c) of Antiphrasis' possible attempt to elude the self-elimination charge by making some *exceptions*, i.e. by limiting the scope of the universal 'everything' in 'Everything is true' and 'Everything is false'. To my knowledge, this is the first discussion of this strategy to be found in the ancient texts (we shall consider some interesting instances of this manoeuvre in part III); what was strikingly absent from the *Theaetetus*, for example, was precisely the suggestion that Protagoras might defend himself by claiming that man is the measure of all things, apart from man's being or not being a measure.³⁶

5.3 DIALECTICAL REFUTATIONS OR LOGICAL PROOFS? SOME METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS (*METAPH.* Κ 5, 1062A36–B11)

Immediately before the passage we shall analyse in this section, the author of κ³⁷ repeats the point, already expressed at the beginning of κ 5 (1062a2–5), that although there can be no proof (ἀπόδειξις) of PNC and similar principles in the full sense (ἀπλῶς), since there is no principle from which they can be inferred that is more certain than them,³⁸ we can produce an *ad hominem* (πρὸς τόνδε)³⁹ proof against those who deny them (1062a30–1). For example, if one had questioned (ἐρωτῶν) Heraclitus himself in the right way, one might have forced him to admit (ὁμολογεῖν) the truth of PNC, since he had adopted his opinion without really understanding what he was saying (1062a31–5), i.e. without realising the unacceptable consequences of his position. We find then two arguments in a sequence. Let us begin by examining the first:

- T19 And in general if what is said by him [*sc.* Heraclitus] is true, not even this itself will be true, I mean that the same thing can at one and the same time both be and not be. For as, when they are separated, the affirmation is no more true than the negation, in the same way – their combination and conjunction

³⁶ Aristotle's criticism of this defensive manoeuvre is based on the infinite repeatability of the true and false predicates (based on T15's account of saying the true and saying the false), which would commit the deniers of truth and falsehood to concede, respectively, infinitely many truths and falsehoods once they have conceded just one.

³⁷ There are some doubts as to the authorship of *Metaphysics* κ (cf. e.g. Jaeger 1934: 208–19, Düring 1966: 278–9, Aubenque 1983). For example, Jaeger argued that κ is Aristotle's work, but earlier than B, Γ and E, whereas Aubenque has powerfully defended the view that κ is a later summary of B, Γ, and E by a different author. I shall analyse some *Metaphysics* κ arguments without any commitment to their precise authorship and chronology.

³⁸ For the demanding Aristotelian requirements on the principles of a proof or demonstration (which must be 'true', 'primitive', 'immediate', 'better known than', 'prior to' and 'explanatory' of the conclusion) cf. *APo.* 1.2.

³⁹ For the sense of *ad hominem* here cf. pp. 91–2.

being like a single affirmation – the whole thing put forward as an affirmation will be no more true than its negation.⁴⁰ (Κ 5, 1062a36–b7)

The precise reason why the truth of Heraclitus' denial of PNC should be thought to imply its contradictory is not immediately transparent. For the inference to be possible, 'what is said by Heraclitus' here must be at least as strong as the generalisation

$$(3) (\forall x)(\forall P) Px \rightarrow \neg Px$$

i.e. must ultimately be equivalent to the contrary of PNC:⁴¹ given any affirmation (e.g. that 'Socrates is pale'), the corresponding negation ('Socrates is not pale') will also be true (or, at least, 'no less' true). But on the basis of the same principle, if their conjunction ('Socrates is pale and is not pale') is treated as if it were a single affirmation,⁴² this conjunction too will be no more true than the corresponding negation ('It is not the case that Socrates is both pale and not pale'). Generalising, if it is true that for any affirmation the corresponding negation is true, then also the negation of this very thesis will be true, and therefore Heraclitus' thesis will not be true (or will be no more true than its negation).

Unlike the other cases examined so far, no dialectical context is obviously presupposed by the way the argument is formulated: T19 indicates that if Heraclitus' thesis (3) is true, then it is false, and not that if one endorsed the truth of (3), one could be forced to admit (3) to be false. Surely we have found, finally, an unambiguous ancient example of a proof, by self-refutation, of the logical falsehood of a certain proposition? More precisely, is the conditional 'if what is said by him is true, not even this itself will be true' to be understood as the premiss of a *Consequentia Mirabilis* whose conclusion ('therefore, what is said by Heraclitus is false') remains implicit?⁴³ We should not be too hasty in answering 'yes' to this question, thus overlooking T19's broader context, and in particular Aristotle's observation, only a few lines above, that if one had *questioned* Heraclitus in the right way one might have compelled him to accept PNC. The report in T19

is definitely elliptical: the question is whether what is missing is an explicit indication of the dialectical nature of the argument or the very conclusion of a formal proof that Heraclitus' thesis is false.

T19 is followed by what sounds like a second self-refutation argument:

T20 Furthermore, if it is not possible to affirm anything truly, this itself will be false, to say that there is no true affirmation. But if some <true affirmation> exists, this will solve what is said by those who raise such objections and utterly destroy dialectic (ἀναιρουντων τὸ διαλέγεσθαι).⁴⁴ (1062b7–11)

The comments just made on T19 hold good, *mutatis mutandis*, here. It is hard to decide whether the argument is best interpreted as a dialectical silencer of *Antiphrasis*, along the lines of most arguments discussed so far in part I, or as a proof of the necessary falsehood of the *propositional content* of Antiphrasis' affirmation that no affirmation is true. This sort of indeterminacy often occurs when one tries to determine the precise logical form of arguments formulated in a natural language. However, the context I have sketched on p. 79 and T20's final remark about the incompatibility of Antiphrasis' 'objections' with the practice of dialectic make me favour, again, the first interpretive line. I suggest that this tentative approval finds indirect support in familiar logical considerations: it would be incorrect, from a logical point of view, to conclude that the affirmation that there is no true affirmation must be false, solely on the basis of its reflexivity,⁴⁵ for supposing that in fact no other affirmation were true, 'No affirmation is true' would be Liar-paradoxical, in a way similar to Epimenides' 'All Cretans say the false' (cf. chapter 1). In other words, the only conclusion one can safely draw about the truth-value of 'There is no true affirmation' on the basis of its self-application is, once again, that 'There is no true affirmation' is either false⁴⁶ or Liar-paradoxical. Although we are not sufficiently informed about the Aristotelian attitude towards the Liar (nor do we know beyond doubt whether Aristotle himself had

⁴⁰ ὁλως δ' εἰ τὸ λεγόμενον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἀληθές, οὐδ' ἂν αὐτὸ τοῦτο εἴη ἀληθές, λέγω δὲ τὸ ἐνδέχεσθαι τὸ αὐτὸ καθ' ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον εἶναι τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι· καθάπερ γὰρ καὶ διηρημένων αὐτῶν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ἢ κατὰ φασιν ἢ ἀπὸ φασιν ἀληθεύεται, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ τοῦ συναμφοτέρου καὶ τοῦ συμπεπλεγμένου καθάπερ μῖς τινὸς καταφάσεως οὐσης οὐθὲν μᾶλλον ἢ ἀπὸ φασιν τὸ ὅλον ὥς ἐν καταφάσει τιθέμενον ἀληθεύεται. I adopt Ross's (1924) emendation of the text: the MSS reading (accepted by Jaeger 1957) is οὐθὲν μᾶλλον ἢ ἀπὸ φασιν ἢ τὸ ὅλον ὥς ἐν καταφάσει τιθέμενον ἀληθεύεται.

⁴¹ Cf. p. 69n3.

⁴² For Aristotle's suspicion regarding propositional conjunction cf. Geach 1963.

⁴³ On *Consequentia Mirabilis* cf. chapter 6, section 1.

⁴⁴ ἔτι δ' εἰ μὴθὲν ἐστὶν ἀληθῶς καταφῆσαι, καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ψεῦδος εἴη τὸ φάναι μηδεμίαν ἀληθῆ κατὰ φασιν ὑπάρχειν. εἰ δ' ἐστὶ τι, λυοίτ' ἂν τὸ λεγόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐνισταμένων καὶ παντελῶς ἀναιρουντων τὸ διαλέγεσθαι.

⁴⁵ Or, more precisely, alleged reflexivity: one could protest that to say (φάναι) that there is no true affirmation (κατὰ φασιν) is not itself an affirmation, but a negation (ἀπὸ φασιν).

⁴⁶ Notice that the author of T20 seems to treat 'not true' and 'false' as equivalent. Had he written that the affirmation 'There is no true affirmation' cannot be true, the interpretation of the argument as a logical proof of such a conclusion would have not been liable to my objection: a proposition which is either false or Liar-paradoxical is indeed not true, whatever stance one decides to take about the Liar Paradox (in the history of philosophy the Liar assertion 'I am speaking falsely' has been variously diagnosed as meaningless, neither true nor false, both true and false, simply false, false in the meta-language, groundless . . . (cf. e.g. Haack 1978: 135–48)).

some definite attitude towards it), in this case it is not philological pedantry but logical charity that invites us to read T20 in a way which does not commit the author of K (possibly the 'inventor' of logic himself) to an incorrect, or at best superficial, approach to the thorny issues raised by the paradox and its cognates.⁴⁷

The exegetical difficulties created by the indeterminacy of passages like T19 and T20 offer an occasion to begin reflecting more explicitly on the complex methodological issues involved in our current enterprise. I suggest that a variety of criteria should constantly concur in our attempts to reconstruct the 'intended logic' (in the broadest sense of the term 'logic') of the ancient arguments we examine. These include (to put it very sketchily):

- philological attention to the minute details of the original formulation of the arguments;
- sensitivity to the narrow and broad context in which those arguments occur, especially with a view to locate possible implicit premisses or operative presuppositions and to obtain further indications concerning the motivations and purposes with which the arguments themselves were advanced;
- historical knowledge of the kind of arguments that a certain philosopher or school (or different ones, but chronologically and philosophically comparable) did and did not use in analogous contexts, of how and why they used them, and of the relevant logical and philosophical tenets formulated in, or at least suggested by, their work;
- broader considerations inspired by the 'principle of charity', fine-tuned on the basis of that historical knowledge, to avoid anachronisms (what could appear to us to be good or bad arguments, or obvious or strange ones, need not have appeared thus to the ancients, and vice versa).

It would be naïve to assume that even the most skilled, judicious and well-balanced handling of these criteria will always produce unequivocal solutions to all our exegetical dilemmas. The answer can well remain susceptible to underdetermination in some cases, and a strong argument

⁴⁷ For analysis of Aristotle's alleged reference to the Liar in Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* cf. Crivelli 2004a and 2004b: 139–51. Crivelli argues that Aristotle does refer to the Liar at SE 25, 180a34–b7 and 'attempts to solve it by assuming that someone uttering "I am speaking falsely" (or whatever sentence-type the paradox turns on) is neither speaking truly nor speaking falsely absolutely' (2004a: 61, 2004b: 31). If this were correct (but cf. Cavini 2007: 127–8), my argument for not interpreting T20's argument as a logical proof would find further corroboration (provided, of course, that the author of K is Aristotle or someone who shares the same views on the Liar).

could be made in some of these for the conclusion that, quite simply, there was some corresponding degree of indeterminacy in the author's or source's mind: one might argue, for example, that it is difficult to pigeonhole the arguments of T19 and T20 as, loosely speaking, 'logical' or 'dialectical' simply because their author(s) did not have any such clear distinction in mind when writing those passages. What a methodologically sound analysis should provide in all cases is a clear sense of all the available ways of reconstructing and interpreting a certain argument, and a justified assessment of their relative plausibility, merits and shortcomings. Of course we are bound to approach the ancient texts with certain interpretive questions on our agenda that are *our* questions, like my recurrent question as to whether ancient self-refutation arguments were logical proofs of the truth-value of certain propositions (or at least translatable into such proofs without major distortion) or very different dialectical manoeuvres. I wish to stress, however, that these questions are inspired in the first place by considerations and details to be found in the ancient texts (although, admittedly, not formulated in the very same terms), are constantly reassessed, revised and clarified in light of new elements emerging from our inquiry, and, especially, are genuinely open questions. I did not approach our survey and analysis of the ancient evidence with an already precise expectation concerning the logic of the ancient self-refutation argument which I hoped would find corroboration from the study of the texts. I am not trying to show how well certain passages can be (more or less ingeniously) made to square with a certain grand interpretive hypothesis concerning the distinctive nature of ancient self-refutation as whole. I wish to let the ancient texts and arguments 'speak for themselves' and direct and shape, as much as possible, our line of inquiry, rather than conform to it.

5.4 APPARENT SELF-REFUTATIONS: 'IT IS NOT POSSIBLE THAT STATEMENTS ARE ALL FALSE, OR ALL TRUE' (METAPH. K 6, 1063B30–5) AND THE ELENCTIC PROOF OF PNC IN Γ 4

The final section of this chapter will be devoted to the analysis of two Aristotelian places which, I shall contend, have been too hastily catalogued as examples of self-refutation arguments. This examination should help to clarify the way in which I take genuine self-refutation arguments to differ from other, albeit related, charges.

5.4.1 *Arguing from a definition* (Metaph. K 6 1063b30–5)

Let us begin with another passage from *Metaphysics* K:

T21 Similarly it is not possible that statements are all false, or all true, both because of many other difficulties which follow from this thesis, and because (1) if all <statements> are false one who states this will not be saying the truth either, and (2) if all are true one who says that all are false will not be saying something false.⁴⁸ (K 6 1063b30–5)

Unlike T18 (p. 76), T21 does not suggest that one should not state that 'Every statement is false' or 'Every statement is true' because to make such statements would be self-defeating; more simply, 'it is not possible that statements are all false, or all true'. Yet the reasons adduced in support of this conclusion appear *prima facie* inconclusive: applying again here the important distinction first mentioned on p. 21, the fact that if all statements were false then the statement 'All statements are false' would not be true either shows only that 'All statements are false' is not a *possibly-true* statement ('one who says this will not be saying the truth either'),⁴⁹ but not that it is not *possible* that all statements are false. For suppose the only existing statements were 'London is the capital of France', 'Plato is the author of the *Metaphysics*' and ' $2 + 2 = 5$ '; in this case all statements would be false (although if I stated 'All statements are false', this statement itself would not be true, but Liar-paradoxical for the now familiar reasons).

To avoid this problem one might conjecture that the reference to 'one who says . . .' (τις φάσκων) in the apodosis of the conditional must indicate that, despite our first impression, the argument is to be understood in the same way as the one in T18, namely as a dialectical silencer of Antiphrasis: he cannot state that every statement is false, because in this case he would refute himself, by unwittingly admitting that his statement is not true either, i.e. is false. On this reading, T21 should no longer be interpreted as a hopeless attempt to establish the absolute impossibility that all statements be false on the basis of the reflexivity of the statement 'All statements are false'. This would require us to accept that T21 is formulated quite elliptically, unless we can prove that its author believed that the dialectical self-refutation of a thesis is also, somehow, a proof of its impossibility, or that he was unable to appreciate the distinction between the two conclusions.

⁴⁸ ὁμοίως δὲ οὐδὲ πάσας ψευδεῖς οὐδ' ἀληθεῖς τὰς φάσεις δυνατόν εἶναι, δι' ἄλλα τε πολλὰ τῶν συναχθέντων ἂν δυσχερὼν διὰ ταύτην τὴν θέσιν, καὶ διότι ψευδῶν μὲν οὐσῶν πασῶν οὐδ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο τις φάσκων ἀληθεύσει, ἀληθῶν δὲ ψευδεῖς εἶναι πάσας λέγων οὐ ψεύσεται.

⁴⁹ Notice that in this case the use of 'not true' instead of 'false' protects the proponent of T21 from the possible charge of overlooking the complexities of the Liar paradox.

This is by no means an insurmountable obstacle, of course, especially in light of what we have observed in other similar passages, but it suggests that we should at least explore alternative readings.

I believe that, in fact, both the interpretations just sketched are incorrect, and fail to account for an important, albeit subtle and so far unnoticed, textual detail. Why does the author of T21 write 'if all <statements> are false, one who states this will not be saying the truth either', rather than the more straightforward (and effective)⁵⁰ 'one who states this will be making a false statement'? Analogously, why does he opt for 'if all <statements> are true, one who says that all are false will not be saying something false', instead of 'will be saying the truth', if the point is that if all statements are true the contrary position must (be admitted to) be true as well?

This oddity can be explained away if we realise that what we find in T21 is not a self-refutation argument at all, *pace* Pseudo-Alexander (*in Metaph.* 658, 20–6), Cherniss (1935: 87n364), Burnyeat (1976a: 44), and Reale (1993: vol. III, 531), but a *reductio ad absurdum* of the two theses in the dock based on Aristotle's account of saying the true and saying the false which we have encountered in T15 (p. 70). If we keep that account in mind, the double argument in T21 can be construed along the following lines:

- (1) it is impossible that all statements are false, because if all statements were false, the statement 'All statements are false', being one of all statements, would itself be false, and therefore it would not be true despite saying of what is <false> that it is <false>, thus *violating the definition of saying the true*;
- (2) it is impossible that all statements are true, because if all statements were true, the statement 'All statements are false', being one of all statements, would also be true, and therefore it would not be false despite saying of what is not <false> that it is <false>, thus *violating the definition of saying the false*.

Given the Aristotelian account of what it is to say something true and something false, it is impossible that statements should all be true or all be false: this possibility is incompatible with that account, which is presupposed in the background of T21. In other words, 'All statements are true' and 'All statement are false' imply an absurd negation of the Aristotelian account of true and false, and therefore cannot be true.⁵¹ As

⁵⁰ Cf. my second comment on Lear on p. 74.

⁵¹ On this reconstruction of the logic of the argument, it is not mandatory that 'All statements are true' and 'All statements are false' are actually stated. The point of T21 is that on the hypothesis that all statements were true (or false) then the corresponding statement, *if it were made*, would violate the Aristotelian account of true and false, which is sufficient reason to discard the hypothesis.

we have already seen, the strategy of arguing against Antiphrasis starting from the definitions of true and false (or obvious corollaries of them) is not unheard of in the *Metaphysics*: cf. the proofs of the Principle of Excluded Middle in Γ 7, 1011b23–9 and of the impossibility that all statements should be false in Γ 8, 1012b5–11.⁵² Therefore, interpreting T21 in the way I have advocated leaves us with an elegant argument of a kind which Aristotle seems eager to use, at the same time saving him (or the Aristotelising author of Κ) from possible charges of logical incompetence or sheer *obscuritas*.

I shall not discuss here Antiphrasis' possible rejoinder against T21's argument as I have reconstructed it (by taking for granted his own account of true and false Aristotle begs the question against him), Aristotle's awareness of this possibility, and some viable Aristotelian counters. For all of this I refer the reader to my parallel remarks in section 1 of this chapter. What I have aimed at proving here is that an argument which various commentators have interpreted as a self-refutation argument, and which, when thus interpreted, is both intrinsically puzzling and difficult to square with my overall analysis of ancient (and Aristotelian) self-refutation, actually is best construed as a sound *reductio* working along very different lines.

5.4.2 The elenctic proof of PNC in Metaph. Γ 4

Whereas T21 is a relatively minor spot in the vast map of Aristotelian scholarship, the passage to consider next has been, and still is, at the centre of enormous scholarly interest and controversy. My present and modest aim is to suggest that, independently of our interpretation of the minute details of the 'elenctic proof' of PNC in Γ 4, from which I will steer clear as much as possible, it is difficult to agree with those commentators who construe it as a self-refutation argument targeting Antiphrasis' denial of PNC.⁵³

A few lines after the beginning of Γ 4 Aristotle explains what proving *ἐλεγκτικῶς* ('elenctically', 'by way of refutation') is, and outlines the skeleton of his elenctic proof of PNC:

T22 But even this [*sc.* the denial of PNC] can be proved to be impossible, by way of refutation (*ἀποδείξαι ἐλεγκτικῶς*), if only the disputant says something; and if he says nothing . . . in so far as he is such, such a person is from the start similar to a vegetable. By 'proving by way of refutation' I mean something different from proving, because in proving one might be thought to beg the original question, but if someone else is responsible for such a thing there will be refutation and not proof. The starting point for all the cases of this

⁵² Cf. pp. 72n13 and 72n14.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. Irwin 1988: 181–8, Cassin and Narcy 1989, Cassin 1993, De Praetere 1993: 356–7, Baltzly 1999, Politis 2004: 147–8.

kind is not to demand that he say that something either is or is not (for one might well believe that this begs the original question), but at least that he signify (*σημαίνειν*) something both to himself and to someone else; for that is necessary, if he really says anything. For otherwise there would be no discourse (*λόγος*) for such a person, either with himself or with someone else. But if one grants this, there will be proof, for there will already be something definite. But the one who is responsible is not he who proves but he who submits; for eliminating discourse he submits to discourse⁵⁴ (*ἀναιρῶν γὰρ λόγον ὑπομένει λόγον*).⁵⁵ (1006a11–26)

Let us try to distil some uncontroversial points emerging from this long passage:

- The denial of PNC can be proved to be impossible (only) elenctically, since any standard proof would be question-begging (or at least would appear to be so).⁵⁶
- The elenctic proof is, broadly speaking, *dialectical*: it begins with, and is based on (*ἀρχή*), something which Antiphrasis *says* ('if only the disputant says something'), probably in response to a request by Aristotle ('the starting point is not to demand that . . . but that . . .').
- This initial request does not beg the question against Antiphrasis, because he is not asked 'to state that something either is or is not', and not – presumably – both; in other words, it is not a standard dialectical question requiring a yes-or-no answer (e.g. 'Is Socrates pale (or not?)').⁵⁷
- There are two possible reactions to Aristotle's initial move:
 - (1) Antiphrasis remains silent, or answers in a way which is tantamount to remaining silent: either way, he 'signifies' nothing, hence 'is similar to a vegetable';
 - (2) Antiphrasis answers in a way which, somehow, commits him to the existence of 'something definite' (*ὥρισμένον*): he, and not his opponent, Aristotle, is therefore responsible for 'something definite' being

⁵⁴ This final sentence is open to a variety of readings, depending on the meaning we attribute to the two occurrences of *λόγον* and to the verb *ὑπομένει* (cf. p. 91n71 below).

⁵⁵ ἔστι δ' ἀποδείξαι ἐλεγκτικῶς καὶ περὶ τούτου ὅτι ἀδύνατον, ἂν μόνον τι λέγῃ ὁ ἀμφισβητῶν· ἂν δὲ μὴν . . . ὁμοίος γὰρ φυτῷ ὁ τοιοῦτος ἢ τοιοῦτος ἦδῃ. τὸ δ' ἐλεγκτικῶς ἀποδείξαι λέγω διαφέρειν καὶ τὸ ἀποδείξαι, ὅτι ἀποδεικνύων μὲν ἂν δόξειεν αἰτεῖσθαι τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ, ἄλλου δὲ τοῦ τοιοῦτου αἰτίου ὄντος ἐλεγχος ἂν εἴη καὶ οὐκ ἀπόδειξις. ἀρχὴ δὲ πρὸς ἅπαντα τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐ τὸ ἀξιοῦν ἢ εἶναι τι λέγειν ἢ μὴ εἶναι (τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ τάχ' ἂν τις ὑπολάβοι τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς αἰτεῖν), ἀλλὰ σημαίνειν γέ τι καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἄλλῳ· τοῦτο γὰρ ἀνάγκη, εἴπερ λέγοι τι εἰ γὰρ μὴ, οὐκ ἂν εἴη τῷ τοιοῦτῳ λόγος, οὐτ' αὐτῷ πρὸς αὐτὸν οὔτε πρὸς ἄλλον. ἂν δὲ τις τοῦτο διδῶ, ἔσται ἀπόδειξις· ἦδη γάρ τι ἔσται ὥρισμένον. ἀλλ' αἴτιος οὐχ ὁ ἀποδεικνύς ἀλλ' ὁ ὑπομένων· ἀναιρῶν γὰρ λόγον ὑπομένει λόγον.

⁵⁶ Cf. p. 71n12 and p. 72n15.

⁵⁷ Such a request would beg the question against Antiphrasis in the third way Aristotle distinguishes in *Top.* 8.13: the questioner is guilty of *petitio principii* if he asks the answerer to concede particular cases of what he has undertaken to conclude universally.

assumed as a premiss. Starting from this 'something definite', an elenctic proof of PNC, namely a refutation (ἐλεγχος) of Antiphrasis' denial of PNC, will be possible. How this proof runs will be explained in detail in what follows at 1006a28–1007b18.

The two more controversial issues are what exactly Aristotle's starting question, or request, is supposed to be⁵⁸ and what exactly the verb σημαίνειν means, here and in the rest of Γ 4.⁵⁹ I suggest that it is difficult to offer any convincing solution to these exegetical cruxes that can be reconciled with the hypothesis that Aristotle's elenctic proof is a kind of self-refutation argument. Let us consider some instructive examples.

According to Irwin's influential reading, for example, Aristotle argues that for Antiphrasis' thesis⁶⁰ to be true, its necessary presuppositions (it is the *same* S – e.g. man – that Antiphrasis signifies as the subject of the contradictory, and therefore *non-identical*, properties *F* and not-*F* – e.g. pale and not pale) must be true; but if these presuppositions are true, then Antiphrasis' thesis is false, since they require a 'semantic' definiteness which the truth of his thesis would bar. Hence if Antiphrasis' thesis is true, it is false; therefore it is false.⁶¹ This nifty reconstruction of the elenctic proof as a *Consequentia Mirabilis*⁶² overlooks an important detail: that Antiphrasis signifies something definite is not presented in T22 as a hidden *presupposition* of Antiphrasis' denial of PNC which we can thereby take for granted as somehow included in that thesis, but as something distinct and independent, which he is asked to concede explicitly.⁶³ Irwin does not clarify how his interpretation could be squared with the textual details of T22, but I presume he should ask us to believe that οὐ τὸ ἀξιοῦν ἢ εἶναι τι λέγειν ἢ μὴ εἶναι... ἀλλὰ σημαίνειν γέ τι καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἄλλῳ (1006a19–21) means, in the context, something like 'not to ask

⁵⁸ Some common proposals are: 'Say something (significant)', 'Is there anything that signifies something?', 'Does what you have just said [*sc.* your denial of PNC] signify something?', 'Does "man" signify something?'.

⁵⁹ For example, is 'what man "signifies"' the (identifiable) subject of reference, man, of which contradictory properties are predicated by Antiphrasis (cf. e.g. Lear 1980: 104–5, Irwin 1988: 182) or the (definite) sense of the word 'man' which Antiphrasis must accept exists whenever he utters 'man' (cf. e.g. Dancy 1975, Cassin 1993)?

⁶⁰ Irwin believes that in this part of Γ 4 Antiphrasis is already advocating the contrary, and not simply the contradictory, of PNC ('For any subject and any of its properties it is possible for that subject to have both the property and its negation').

⁶¹ Irwin 1988: 181. Elsewhere Irwin (1977: 222) claims that these unavoidable presuppositions 'cannot be rejected without self-refutation or self-defeating silence and failure to speak significantly'.

⁶² For detailed discussion of *Consequentia Mirabilis* cf. section 1 of chapter 6.

⁶³ I agree with Bolton (1994: 348) that Irwin's type of reconstruction in terms of implicit presuppositions 'misconstrues Aristotle's elenchus. An elenchus is based not on the necessary presuppositions of an opponent's thesis, or of its intelligibility or the like, but only on what is explicitly granted... by the opponent'.

<Antiphrasis> to say that something either is or is not... but <to ask him to say> that at least he signifies something both to himself and to someone else <whenever he puts forward a counterexample to PNC, e.g. "man is pale and is not pale">'. This is demanding a lot, even of Aristotle's notorious *obscura brevisitas*. Moreover, to ask Antiphrasis whether his denials of PNC signify something or not would be, in fact, to ask him 'to say that something either is or is not', begging the question and disregarding Aristotle's own advice. Finally, Antiphrasis' refusal to concede that these denials bear definite signification would be perhaps too harshly compared to the condition of *silent* vegetables anyway.

Baltzly is even more explicit in his contention that the elenctic proof of PNC in Γ 4 'is most obviously intended as a self-refutation argument' (1999: 174). In T22 Aristotle would be explaining that the truth of PNC can be established by proving that its negation is 'operationally self-refuting': if it 'were true, neither it nor anything else could be said or thought' (173).⁶⁴ To be able to assert his denial of PNC, which destroys meaningful discourse and thought (ἀναιρῶν λόγον), Antiphrasis must at least admit that something definite exists (the sense of the words he uses) and accept certain basic conditions on the meaningfulness of discourse (ὑπομένει λόγον) which imply the truth of PNC.⁶⁵ If, conversely, PNC and those conditions failed to hold, it would be impossible to deny or affirm anything meaningfully, including PNC and its denial. I shall return to operational self-refutation and its possible ancient antecedents in part II. What I want to stress here is, again, that Baltzly's proposal to construe Aristotle's argument as a self-refutation charge lacks solid textual grounds: the admission of something definite from which the elenctic proof can take off seems to be presented by Aristotle as the consequence of Antiphrasis' agreeing to say something (ἂν μόνον τι λέγῃ) or something significant (σημαίνειν γέ τι),⁶⁶ and not of Antiphrasis' willingness to assert *his own thesis* (the negation of PNC) or to grant that *it* carries definite signification.

Irwin's and Baltzly's reconstructions are interesting illustrations of a certain tendency to extrapolate ideas and arguments that are presented, more or less explicitly, in the ancient texts and draw on them to construct what appear to be convincing objections against the original targets of those

⁶⁴ According to Baltzly (1999: 171), in this way Aristotle adopts a typical Platonic argument pattern, the 'method of dialectic' described in the middle books of the *Republic*. For discussion and criticism of this view cf. part II, chapter 13, section 4.

⁶⁵ Cf. Baltzly 1999: 195n37.

⁶⁶ Or, at most, as the consequence of Antiphrasis' agreeing to grant that something signifies (on the different, but in my opinion less straightforward, reading of οὐ τὸ ἀξιοῦν ἢ εἶναι τι λέγειν ἢ μὴ εἶναι... ἀλλὰ σημαίνειν γέ τι at 1006a19–21).

texts and arguments, quite independently of the precise way in which that material was put to use by the ancient authors themselves within their own argumentative strategy as developed in particular contexts. I am not suggesting that there is something inherently wrong with this: the reason why the study of ancient philosophy is not a narrow antiquarian or historical enterprise, and why we should want to devote our time and effort to such a study, is that by 'doing ancient philosophy' we are (or at we least should be) naturally stimulated to do philosophy, in a fruitful conversation with the ancients.⁶⁷ 'What could we object against a denier of PNC?', we can ask ourselves, today just as twenty-four centuries ago. 'Look at Aristotle's main lesson in *Metaphysics* Γ 4. There is an indissoluble link between PNC and the very possibility of definite signification; thus if PNC broke down, this (like anything else) could not even be meaningfully expressed. If, conversely, you can express a meaningful denial of PNC, this is already sufficient to show that PNC actually holds, at least for you and anyone else for whom your words have some meaning. Any denial of PNC is thus self-refuting'. This is only the embryo of a possible 'Aristotelian' reply to Antiphrasis (I have left a number of crucial details indeterminate on purpose), a reply which is clearly *inspired* by what Aristotle writes in Γ 4 and which, presumably, he *could* have endorsed. As it stands, such an embryonic reply raises a variety of pressing questions and problems which will get fruitful philosophical reflection (and conversation with Aristotle) going. However, we should be wary of the easy temptation to conflate this argument with the one at which Aristotle himself hints in T22 and other related Γ 4 passages; before we can do that, we should take care to clarify how this particular manoeuvre could be squared with Aristotle's actual words in those passages and with their relevant context. And this task, I have suggested, is something that Irwin's and Baltzly's thought-provoking reconstructions fail to perform in a clear and convincing way.

If Aristotle's elenctic proof of PNC is not based on the self-refuting nature of Antiphrasis' denial of PNC, what kind of argument is it? One thing that is clear is that, like the self-refutation arguments we have encountered so far, it presupposes and requires some kind of *dialectical context*. In virtue of his decision to engage in discussion with Aristotle, rather than remain silent like a vegetable or produce meaningless noises, Antiphrasis cannot help granting certain admissions from which PNC itself, and thus the falsehood of his thesis, can be somehow inferred. It is clear that, among these admissions, the one that something bears definite signification is

prominent. For my present limited purposes we need not be concerned with clarifying what exactly all these admissions are, and especially how exactly they are supposed to entail PNC (and in what sense of 'entail'). It will be sufficient to notice that, as Wedin has convincingly argued, Aristotle's 'proof by way of refutation' had the broad structure of a direct refutation of NOT-PNC, i.e. of a *direct proof* of PNC

's' signifies	initially granted by Antiphrasis
's' signifies → PNC	argued by Aristotle and conceded by Antiphrasis

PNC

in which, crucially, Antiphrasis' thesis, not-PNC, does not figure among the premisses of its own refutation (2000: 129).⁶⁸ In other words, the elenctic proof of PNC is, unsurprisingly, an elenchus of Antiphrasis' thesis, not-PNC,⁶⁹ based on certain *other* premisses which Antiphrasis cannot help granting if he wants to participate in any dialectical exchange, and not, narrowly, if he wants to state or defend his own denial of PNC.⁷⁰ On this construal of the elenctic proof, the crucial sentence at the end of T22, which some have read as a compressed summary of the self-refutation argument⁷¹ (e.g. by the very act of destroying rational discourse by his denial of PNC (ἀναιρῶν γὰρ λόγον) Antiphrasis recurs to significant language (ὑπομένει λόγον) which presupposes PNC itself), can be interpreted as follows: although Antiphrasis says things (like his denial of PNC) which, if true, would destroy any rational discourse (ἀναιρῶν γὰρ λόγον), he opts to engage in some kind of rational exchange with his opponent (instead of remaining silent), and thereby submits to certain principles of rationality (ὑπομένει λόγον) such as the commitment to saying something significant 'both to himself and to someone else'; but this submission is itself sufficient to commit him to PNC and to bring about his defeat.⁷²

Aristotle's elenctic proof, which is set in a dialectical context and has a well-defined structure which seems to follow the pattern I have just

⁶⁸ Shields' translation 'indirect demonstration' (2007: 251) is therefore not only extremely loose, but also misleading.

⁶⁹ Cf. 1006a15–18 (in T22 above): 'by "proving by way of refutation" I mean something different from proving... there will be refutation and not proof. For the Aristotelian definition of elenchus cf. SE 5, 167a23–7; on the Aristotelian elenchus cf. Bolton 1993, Cavini 1993b, Gobbo 1997. In the introduction I have argued that elenchus and self-refutation argument should be kept distinct.

⁷⁰ This makes the elenctic proof of PNC different from the (already loose) self-refutation argument against the οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν thesis as developed in the *Euthydemus* (cf. chapter 4, section 1).

⁷¹ Cf. e.g. Cassin 1993, who distinguishes three possible ways of construing the self-refutation ('logical', 'pragmatic' and 'transcendental').

⁷² For a reading along these lines cf. e.g. Whitaker 1996: 188–9.

⁶⁷ For more refined and thought-provoking considerations on this topic cf. Wardy 2006.

sketched, should be kept distinct from the related 'meta-elenctic argument', i.e. the more abstract reflection or 'moral' which we can extrapolate from the elenctic proof and which expresses its underlying rationale: borrowing Code's words, 'adherence to PNC is a prerequisite for significant thought and discourse', i.e. 'it would be impossible to make a significant statement or have a significant thought unless that thought or discourse were in conformity with the PNC', so that 'everyone, insofar as he or she is rational, insofar as he or she has significant thoughts at all, presupposes the principle', including the opponent of PNC itself (1987: 144–5). The elenctic proof proper and the meta-elenctic argument just described are often conflated by commentators, which is another manifestation of the same tendency I have discussed above with reference to Irwin's and Baltzly's interpretations of the elenctic proof itself as a self-refutation argument. This is not to claim that the meta-elenctic argument is purely *our* creation, and so much the less that it would be unacceptable to Aristotle: my point is that nowhere is it formulated by Aristotle himself.

More than once in Γ 4 Aristotle underlines that Antiphrasis' position is incompatible with dialectic,⁷³ in a way strongly reminiscent of crucial remarks we have found in the Platonic texts in chapter 4: e.g. 'there would be no discourse (λόγος) for such a person, either with himself or with anyone else' (1006a22–4); 'if words do not signify, mutual discussion (τὸ διαλέγεσθαι) is eliminated' (1006b8–9); 'if one does that, there is no discussion (οὐ διαλέγεται)' (1007a19–20). As Irwin observes, however, the elenctic proof is not *ad hominem* in the sense that it depends on the beliefs of a *particular* interlocutor or group of interlocutors: 'no other interlocutor who remains an interlocutor can refuse the concession that Antiphrasis has to make... anyone who refuses... might as well be a vegetable'.⁷⁴ Irwin also stresses that the elenctic proof cannot rule out the *logical possibility* that PNC is false, since we might be wrong in thinking that there exists a reality of the sort that is commonly assumed to make our language, dialectic, and rational inquiry meaningful:⁷⁵ logic cannot establish for us

⁷³ The deeply dialectical nature of the elenctic proof of PNC is stressed by Bolton 1994.

⁷⁴ Irwin 1988: 187 (slightly adapted). In Irwin's own jargon, the elenctic proof of PNC is not an instance of 'ordinary dialectic', but of 'strong dialectic' (187–8). This is not countered by *Metaph.* κ 5, 1061b34–1062a11: that the only possible proof of PNC is *ad hominem* (πρὸς τόνδε) only means that it must start from some concession which the interlocutor (Antiphrasis) grants.

⁷⁵ Irwin 1988: 187. It should be noticed, however, that Irwin's point seems to be incompatible with his own reconstruction of the skeleton of the elenctic proof as a *Consequentia Mirabilis* (cf. p. 88). According to Baltzly, it is exactly the 'intuition that it is no accident that the world can be spoken and thought of, i.e. the presupposition that the world is intelligible, that underlies Aristotle's use of operational self-refutation as a means to establish the unhypothetical truth of PNC (1999: 191–2).

that the correct attitude towards the world⁷⁶ is not to abandon 'rational thinking' as a pure illusion and to embrace the silent life of vegetables. This is a fundamentally sound and important point to make; it must be added, however, that, if interpreted correctly, the elenctic proof does not aim, in the first place, at establishing what it cannot in fact establish. Aristotle's elenctic proof is a strategy which can be employed to defeat any denier of PNC, by forcing him to admit the truth of PNC in virtue of his very participation in rational discussion. As such, it does not purport to rule out the logical possibility that PNC is false. It is rather the meta-elenctic argument that interpreters have extrapolated from the elenctic proof that suffers the limitations typical of 'transcendental arguments'⁷⁷ and should not be assumed to be a clinching proof of the necessary truth of PNC.⁷⁸

These sketchy remarks about the nature of Aristotle's elenctic proof of PNC remind us of analogous ones we have found to be valid for ancient self-refutation arguments. One might conclude that, the differences I have pointed out notwithstanding, the elenctic proof is not, at the end of the day, so dissimilar from a self-refutation argument. This impression is not completely off the mark: it is not difficult to imagine how Aristotle *could* have shaped his elenctic proof into the self-refutation pattern, for example along the same lines as Baltzly's proposal: 'When you state your denial of PNC, you must mean something definite by the words you utter to formulate it, otherwise you would not be really taking part in our discussion, but just making noises (which is not much more dignified than cabbage-style silence); but then you yourself are committed, unwittingly, to PNC and to the falsehood of your own position'. A challenging question is why Aristotle did not opt for any such neat formulation, as patient analysis of the details of the text of *Metaphysics* Γ 4 seems to indicate. Did he fail to notice this possibility? This hypothesis sounds far-fetched in light of

I believe, however, that it is not clear whether this can be said to be Aristotle's presupposition rather than, once again, something to which Antiphrasis commits himself by the act itself of engaging in discussion (and thus whether for Aristotle this presupposition can be used as a premiss to establish the absolute truth of PNC, or only the incoherence of Antiphrasis' position). On 'operational self-refutation' cf. part II, chapter 13, section 1; for Baltzly's discussion of the prominent role of operational self-refutation in Plato and criticism of it cf. part II, chapter 13, section 4.

⁷⁶ Or, at least, toward some part of the world for which PNC does not hold. Cf. Code 1987: 149: 'A person might believe that the PNC does govern his significant thoughts and statements and yet *disbelieve* the general principle. He might even believe that there are all sorts of true contradictions, but that a limitation of the human intellect prevents us from knowing them.'

⁷⁷ On these limitations cf. the seminal Stroud 1968. Cf. also p. 216n47.

⁷⁸ Cf. Code 1986: 356: 'The fact that acceptance of PNC is required for significant thought is not the reason why PNC is true. But Aristotle is not trying to show why the principle is true. He is concerned to show why it must be accepted as true... why it must be the case that I, or anybody else engaged in significant thought or discourse, accept it.'

Aristotle's Platonic heritage. Did he believe that shaping his elenctic proof thus would not make his case any stronger? (I have already signalled above Aristotle's limited enthusiasm towards self-refutation arguments.) Or is his choice to be explained by appealing to more profound considerations involving the logic of the elenctic proof? This answer would be worth exploring in more detail than is possible here. It is not clear, for example, what Aristotle himself would have said each of the Greek words composing Antiphrasis' thesis 'signifies', supposing this thesis sounded like

τὸ αὐτὸ ἅμα εἶναι τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι δυνατόν καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτό

the same thing can be and not be at the same time and in the same respect.

From the little we can gather from his scanty and unsystematic remarks on the subject, it seems that in Aristotle's view particles, prepositions and connectives would not count as 'significant' utterances (cf. e.g. *Poet.* 20, 1456b38–1457a10). Also the verb 'to be' does not seem to signify anything definite when taken in isolation, but only 'additionally signifies' (προσσημαίνει), within a sentence, a combination between a subject and a predicate (cf. *Int.* 3, 16b22–5).⁷⁹ If this is correct, εἶναι would also be a slippery stepping-stone to use in an elenctic proof, and the pronoun αὐτός and the adjective δυνατός would remain the only (and not very manageable) candidates as bearers of definite signification.

Perhaps more importantly, to try to focus on Antiphrasis' specific formulation of his denial of PNC might have not been the best strategy anyway. Antiphrasis is not, after all, a single well-defined historical figure with a well-defined (and univocally expressed) philosophical thesis; he is a hazy 'living bundle' of several interrelated positions (e.g. Heraclitean, Anaxagorean and Protagorean) which Aristotle believes to be ultimately committed, more or less explicitly and consciously, to some kind of denial of PNC. If your adversary has no single well-defined and easily recognisable position, it is tactically prudent not to construe your argument as a specific attack on a narrow and partial formulation of that position.⁸⁰ Once again, the aims and constraints of dialectic might have had a crucial role in shaping the form of an ancient philosophical argument.

⁷⁹ Cf. Whitaker 1996: 55–9, 190–1. For a different view cf. Burnyeat (2003: 13–14), according to whom in Aristotle's view 'the "is" which joins subject to predicate has semantic meaning in its own right' which 'varies with the category of the predicate it joins to a subject'.

⁸⁰ Some have suggested that Aristotle's use of 'man' in the elenctic proof as an example of a term which must carry definite signification is an allusion to Protagoras' 'Man is the measure' (cf. e.g. Gottlieb 1992: 185), but this proposal is purely conjectural.

CHAPTER 6

Introducing περιτροπή: Sextus Empiricus

In the previous four chapters we have analysed several ancient arguments which denounced certain extremist views on truth and falsehood as self-refuting, detecting interesting analogies in their logic. The passages we shall consider in this chapter, all from Sextus Empiricus' *corpus*, both testify to the continuous survival, and indeed flourishing, of the same argumentative pattern over the centuries which separate Aristotle and Sextus¹ (or Sextus' sources) and seem to reflect a more explicit awareness of its distinctiveness,² as suggested by the frequent adoption of a semi-technical vocabulary to label it: the verb περιτρέπειν ('to reverse', 'to turn around') and its substantival form περιτροπή ('reversal', 'turnabout', 'turning the tables').

6.1 'EVERY APPEARANCE IS TRUE': DIALECTICAL REVERSAL OR CONSEQUENTIA MIRABILIS? (M 7.389–90)

Let us begin with one of the best known self-refutation arguments reported by Sextus, having, once again, a (supposedly) Protagorean thesis as its target:

- τ23 One could not say that every appearance (φαντασίαν) is true, because of reversal (περιτροπήν), as both Democritus and Plato taught contradicting Protagoras; for if every appearance is true, it will also be true, being based on an appearance, that not every appearance is true, and thus it will become false that every appearance is true. And even apart from this kind of reversal (περιτροπής) . . .³ (M 7.389–90)

¹ It is impossible to establish Sextus' dates with any certainty. House (1980: 231) believes that the evidence is such 'that one cannot do any more than set a limit on the possible dates of Sextus which range from A.D. 100 to the first part of the third century'. Most scholars, however, locate Sextus' *floruit* by the end of the second century AD, and Decleva Caizzi (1993: 330) has argued, conjecturally, that Sextus' *floruit* should be located about 150–170.

² Cf. Burnyeat 1976a: 47. As my analysis will clarify, however, I do not agree this is a higher level of 'consciousness of logical form' (italics mine).

³ πᾶσαν μὲν οὖν φαντασίαν οὐκ ἂν εἴποι τις ἀληθῆ διὰ τὴν περιτροπήν, καθὼς ὁ τε Δημόκριτος καὶ ὁ Πλάτων ἀντιλέγοντες τῷ Πρωταγόρᾳ ἐδίδασκον· εἰ γὰρ πᾶσα φαντασία ἐστὶν ἀληθής,

The noun περιτροπή is used twice here to brand the kind of argument presented in the middle of the passage: what is this label supposed to mean and how does that argument work? In his first seminal article on ancient self-refutation Burnyeat suggested that although 'any refutation, of course, establishes the contrary of what it refutes', περιτρέπειν and περιτροπή tended 'particularly to be used of the special case where the thesis to be refuted itself serves as a premise for its own refutation, where starting out with "*p*" we deduce "*not-p*" and so conclude that the original premise was false' (1976a: 48).⁴ In Sextus and, more generally, in Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic philosophical jargon, περιτροπή came to indicate not simply a reversal or refutation of a thesis into its contradictory, but a *self*-reversal or *self*-refutation which has that very thesis as its own premiss (there is an evident metaphorical component in this jargon, just as we have observed in chapter 4, section 1 for Plato's use of καταβάλλειν and ἀνατρέπειν).⁵ Let us investigate how this broad outline fits the logic of τ23's argument.

If we take τ23 at face value, we might think that Democritus and Plato presented the following anti-Protagorean argument:

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | (1) Every appearance is true | Assumption
(Protagoras' thesis) |
| 2 | (2) It is an appearance that not every appearance is true | Assumption |
| 1,2 | (3) It is true that not every appearance is true | From (1) and (2) |
| ? | (4) It is false that every appearance is true | ? ⁶ |

I shall sidestep the question of how Protagoras' relativistic outlook could turn, in most of the following philosophical and doxographical tradition

καὶ τὸ μὴ πᾶσαν φαντασίαν εἶναι ἀληθῆ, κατὰ φαντασίαν ὑφιστάμενον, ἔσται ἀληθές, καὶ οὕτω τὸ πᾶσαν φαντασίαν εἶναι ἀληθῆ γενήσεται ψεῦδος. καὶ χωρὶς δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης περιτροπῆς...

⁴ I shall suggest that Burnyeat's final clause needs careful scrutiny. It should be noticed that actually the fact that the self-refuting thesis 'serves as a premise for its own refutation' is not a distinctive trait of self-refutation arguments: any indirect proof, e.g. by *reductio ad absurdum*, can be seen as a refutation of the contradictory of the conclusion in which the contradictory of the conclusion is itself a premiss. Although the 'thesis' subject to reversal is, as I shall argue, usually more complex than a simple proposition, or even a statement of it, it is certainly incorrect to offer a general account of περιτροπή as 'the deployment of an *argument* against its original proponents' (Hankinson 1995: 284, italics mine).

⁵ It is not implausible that περιτρέπειν and περιτροπή could have themselves been used as pieces of combat jargon, although we do not have much evidence for this usage (the late occurrence of περιτροπαῖς in Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 639f discussed by Herrmann (1995: 105) is to my knowledge the only one). For my conjecture that the Epicurean phrase περικάτω τρέπειν could have belonged to the wrestling and *pankration* jargon cf. part II, chapter 9 (p. 156).

⁶ I shall suggest below that there are two alternative interpretations for this final step to be considered.

(starting as early as Aristotle), into an 'infallibilist' thesis to the effect that every appearance is (unqualifiedly) true.⁷ The *Theaetetus* passages we have examined in section 2 of chapter 4 could have contributed to the process, giving some readers the impression that the Protagorean thesis under fire was an unrelativised assertion that whatever appears is true, and Plato's complex dialectical arguments might have been thereby read along the simplified lines recorded in τ23. As for Democritus, although we do not possess any independent evidence for his employing (and possibly devising)⁸ any such argument against Protagoras, I see no serious reasons for doubting the reliability of Sextus' attribution: Plutarch informs us that Democritus wrote 'many and persuasive things' against Protagoras (*Colot.* 1109A4). One could even find a thin clue in support of Sextus' accuracy in another Sextan passage, in which we are informed that Xenias of Corinth, 'who was mentioned by Democritus too', asserted 'that everything is false, and that every appearance and judgement are false' (*M* 7.53). If Democritus had something to say about such an obscure figure, we can suppose that it was to criticise the theses which Sextus attributes to Xenias, or at least the first.⁹ One might thus conjecture that Democritus attacked Xenias' 'Everything is false' by some self-refutation argument analogous to that which, according to Sextus, he employed against Protagoras' contrary (and no less extremist) position (cf. τ34 and τ35 in section 6.2 below).¹⁰

What we can safely affirm is that, since the noun περιτροπή certainly did not appear in Plato, Sextus' own phrasing does not authorise us to believe that it was used by Democritus either: our source might be applying a later, Hellenistic label to an argument which was anonymous (or otherwise labelled) in both the authors he mentions as its proponents. However, we should not even be hasty in discarding the possibility that Democritus, unlike Plato, did use περιτροπή, or περιτρέπειν, in connection with his

⁷ For a relativist Protagoras cf., however, Cic. *Luc.* 142; S.E. *PH* 1.216; *M* 7.60.

⁸ Sextus' wording might suggest that Democritus used the argument before Plato (or that Democritus and Plato used the argument more or less at the same time), but cannot settle the issue (*pace* Zilioli 2007: 114; for Democritus' uncertain dates cf. Lee 2005: 182–3). That Democritus used the argument before Plato is taken for granted by Burnyeat (cf. p. 98n11).

⁹ One could argue that actually Democritus might have had some sympathy for Xenias' second thesis, but only if 'appearance' and 'judgement' are interpreted in a narrow perceptual sense (cf. 1116 on p. 309). Morel believes that Democritus 'mentioned' Xenias not to criticise him, but to endorse, at least partially, his position (1996: 430–1): cf. *Metaph.* 1 5, 1009b11–12, where Aristotle claims that 'Democritus asserts that there is no truth, or at least to us it is unclear' (but the context indicates that this report is meant to refer to sense-perception only) and Cic. *Luc.* 73, where Democritus is reported to have flatly denied the existence of truth. On the relationship between Democritus and Xenias cf. also Brunschwig 1984; on Democritus' 'scepticism' cf. part III, chapter 15, section 1.

¹⁰ Democritus used at least another famous self-refutation charge (cf. 1116 on p. 309).

anti-Protagorean argument, and perhaps even prompted the philosophical career of these terms.¹¹

But let us return to the argument itself. Premiss (2) ('It is an appearance that not every appearance is true') is necessary in order to infer, in conjunction with Protagoras' (1), that it is true that not every appearance is true (3). Burnyeat found this puzzling: what is the rationale of saying that (1) is *self-refuting*, if its reversal can be arrived at only with the aid of the extra premiss (2), which seems to be only contingently true?¹² One might protest that this perplexity arises from the presupposition that in ancient *περιτροπή*, just like in modern absolute self-refutation (cf. chapter 2), a *single* proposition must be responsible for its own refutation. It is worth stressing, however, that in T23 not only we are not told that (1) is turned around by itself alone, but actually also the 'by itself' is missing (whereas the reflexive nature of the reversal will be explicit in other passages, the requirement that only one proposition is involved is never expressed). None the less, Burnyeat's solution deserves careful scrutiny:

We are to imagine Protagoras putting forward a subjectivist doctrine, according to which whatever appears to anyone to be so is so in fact, (1). He is opposed by someone saying that to him it appears, on the contrary, that not everything that appears to someone to be so is so in fact, (2). But Protagoras has only to be opposed like this and he will be forced to deny his own thesis and admit defeat, i.e. that not every appearance is true. His subjectivism is a non-starter, bound to lose him the debate before it has a chance to get going. It is necessarily a loser because in a dialectical context (2), contingent though it is, is in a sense guaranteed to hold; for there is no debate without disagreement and clash of views... We began with the simple and, if you like, strictly self-refuting case of a thesis falsified by its own content. Then came falsification by the way a proposition is presented... Now it is the act of submitting a thesis for debate or maintaining it in the face of disagreement that causes its reversal and shows it up as false. One might call this dialectical self-refutation, and say that a thesis so falsified is dialectically self-refuting. (1976a: 59, slightly adapted)

¹¹ *Contra* Burnyeat 1976a: 66–7: since 'philosophical writing before Epicurus has plenty of occasion to speak of self-refutation, but the varied vocabulary used for the purpose makes no mention of reversal... the idea of reversal can be traced to the first decade of the third century BC when the Hellenistic philosophies were taking shape, and whether or not it originated then or not long before, which is quite likely, it certainly played a major role in the prolonged and intensive debating which went on between the rival movements in their formative years'. Burnyeat presupposes that it is unlikely that the *περιτροπή* vocabulary had originated well before Hellenistic times, with Democritus, on the sole basis that it is not to be found in Plato and Aristotle. After all, however, Democritus' name is conspicuously absent from Plato's writings, and as we have seen in chapter 5 Aristotle was not keen on self-refutation charges. One might conjecture that Epicurus borrowed the *περιτροπή* jargon from Democritus and revived it (for a similar suggestion cf. Vander Waerdt 1989: 249n59 and part II, chapter 9).

¹² Cf. Burnyeat 1976a: 49.

Burnyeat's emphasis on the necessity of placing T23's *περιτροπή* in some kind of dialectical background to do full justice to its logic is an important contribution to our understanding of the argument, and does not come as a surprise at this point of our inquiry.¹³ I have argued that careful analysis reveals that all the ancient self-refutation arguments we have analysed so far are best understood as presupposing dialectical contexts, even when such contexts are not explicitly mentioned; Burnyeat suggests that the same approach might be required in the case of T23 too. Undoubtedly thinking of T23's argument in dialectical terms has the advantage of transforming an extra premiss that would otherwise be only contingently true, (2), in a background assumption guaranteed to be true by the dialectical context itself. But, one might protest, why should we not be content with proving that, *as things stand*, Protagoras' thesis must be false, since it is indisputable that it appears to someone (indeed to many, and perhaps everyone) that not all appearances are true?¹⁴ So interpreted, the argument in T23 would not produce a formal proof of the *logical* impossibility of Protagoras' thesis, but would be an effective non-dialectical refutation of it.

I add here a first small additional clue to the existence of an implicit dialectical background to T23's argument (weightier evidence will follow in the next few pages). According to Sextus, the *περιτροπή* argument shows why one could not *say* (οὐκ ἂν εἴποι τις), with Protagoras, that every appearance is true: while this could be the case simply because the argument establishes the falsehood of that thesis (and one should always avoid saying something demonstrably false), it seems much more natural to suppose that to *say* that every appearance is true plays some specific role in the reversal. If you say that, you will incur dialectical *περιτροπή* and you will be defeated by your opponent who takes the opposite position, just in virtue of what you are saying and his opposition.

¹³ Burnyeat seems to suggest that in T23 *φαντασία* is, just like *περιτροπή*, a later technical concept, extraneous to the original formulation of the argument in Democritus and Plato (1976a: 47n5). This is not obvious: the term *φαντασία* is used twice in the *Theaetetus*, at 152c1 and 161e8, in the exposition of Protagoras' doctrine, both times with the relevant meaning of 'what appears (φαίνεται)'. Moreover, to insist that *φαντασία* is intended in its later technical sense in T23 could be dangerous for Burnyeat's own interpretation: from a Stoic perspective, any mind content, even when not assented to but simply entertained, is a *φαντασία*, so the presence of a dialectical opponent would become redundant on this reading, because the proponent of the thesis according to which every *φαντασία* is true must presumably entertain also the contradictory thought that not every *φαντασία* is true (even when not actually considering the possibility that it is true).

¹⁴ McPherran believes that T23 presents an absolute self-refutation argument, where no dialectical context is required, since 'Sextus would take it as a given (contingent but historical) that prior to the assertion that "Every appearance is true" it has appeared to someone (at least Xenocrates) that "Not every appearance is true"' (1987: 293n8).

This brings us to my first doubt about Burnyeat's understanding of dialectical self-refutation, according to which dialectical self-refutation would 'show up a thesis as false', or 'falsify' it. If these were alternative ways of conveying the idea that the proponent of a dialectically self-refuting thesis ends up denying it, or admitting its falsehood, I would have no qualms about accepting such jargon. Since, however, Burnyeat adopts the same vocabulary of falsification also for two other species of self-refutation (absolute and pragmatic), in which the falsification of the thesis involved does not consist in a mere denial by its proponent, but is supposed to amount to an objective proof of its falsehood, the very notion of falsification is not innocuous here, but seems to smuggle a non-dialectical element back into the camp of dialectical self-refutation. The conclusion that the reversed thesis is false was even indicated as the final deductive step of *any* περιτροπή argument in Burnyeat's general account quoted on p. 96: 'starting out with "*p*" we deduce "*not-p*" and so conclude that the original premise was false' (1976a: 48, italics mine). It is not clear then whether Burnyeat does not distinguish dialectical reversal (of a certain thesis and its supporters) from falsification (of the propositional content of the thesis) or supposes that the dialectical manoeuvre of περιτροπή is, or always brings with itself, a falsification of the thesis involved as well. Let me illustrate my distinction between dialectical reversal and proof that a certain proposition is false by self-refutation:

- Suppose I tell you 'I cannot utter an English sentence longer than nine words' (*p*); you can easily object, 'But this sentence you have just uttered contains ten words!', and force me to admit the contradictory of my initial thesis ('I must concede I was wrong, I can utter English sentences longer than nine words' (*not-p*)). I have incurred περιτροπή. In this case it is clear that the dialectical reversal coincides with a falsification of the reversed thesis: my initial utterance was an actual counterexample to what I was saying, and thus falsified its own propositional content.¹⁵
- Suppose I tell you 'All sentences I utter which contain the phrase "self-refuting vegetable" are false' (*p*); you can easily object, 'But the sentence you have just uttered does contain the phrase "self-refuting vegetable", so you are bound to admit that what you have just said is false, and that some sentences you utter containing the phrase "self-refuting vegetable" are true' (*not-p*). I have incurred, again, περιτροπή: I could not stick to my initial thesis and was forced to grant you its contradictory. In this case, however, it is far from clear that the dialectical reversal also delivers a falsification of the reversed thesis. Is it really the case that whenever I state

¹⁵ This would be one form of 'pragmatic self-refutation' which I shall discuss in part II, chapter 10.

'All sentences I utter which contain the phrase "self-refuting vegetable" are false' I am saying something demonstrably false? An easy comparison with the Epimenides Paradox (cf. pp. 15 and 81), which I leave to the reader, will show, once again, that this conclusion would be unwarranted.

Let us come back now to our passage T23, and try to read it through dialectical lenses as suggested by Burnyeat. From the Protagorean thesis (1), and Protagoras' opponent's dissent (2), Protagoras' confession follows that (3) 'It is true that not every appearance is true'; but then (4), 'It is false that every appearance is true', is added as a further and final consequence. In my schematisation of the argument on p. 96 I left this final step unexplained. I suggest the most natural way of reading this inference is to see (4) as a straightforward consequence of (3) (for the law $T\neg p \rightarrow Fp$), i.e. as an extra turn of the screw aimed at making Protagoras' defeat more glaring by having him admit explicitly the falsehood of his own thesis (and not only the truth of its contradictory).¹⁶

As we have seen, one might be tempted to read T23 at face value and propose a completely different interpretation of the argument as a non-dialectical proof, by self-refutation, of the falsehood of the Protagorean doctrine. Such a proof could run along the following lines:

1	(1)	Every appearance is true	Protagoras' thesis
2	(2)	It is an appearance that not every appearance is true	Assumption
1,2	(3)	It is true that not every appearance is true	From (1) and (2)
1,2	<3.1>	Not every appearance is true	From (3), by $Tp \rightarrow p$
2	<3.2>	If every appearance is true, not every appearance is true	From (1) and <3.1>
3,3	<3.3>	If something implies its own contradictory, it is false	Law of classical calculus
2, 3,3	(4)	It is false that every appearance is true	From <3.2> and <3.3> ¹⁷

¹⁶ Cf. p. 74 for a similar manoeuvre. Unlike the cases of 'Everything is true' or 'Everything is false', here the application of the principle that whenever a proposition is true (false) its contradictory is false (true) is not obviously question-begging. It is far from clear that someone who proposes the thesis that 'Every appearance is true' is thereby also rejecting that basic principle.

¹⁷ For reconstructions along these lines cf. e.g. Barnes 1982a: 552, Bellissima and Pagli 1996: 178.

I will not stress further the problem that, on such a reconstruction, (2) would be the assumption of a contingent extra-logical truth, which would remain 'undischarged' at the conclusion of the argument. This shows that the argument cannot conclude that the Protagorean thesis is a 'logical falsehood', but this is not particularly disturbing unless one approaches the argument with the preconception that self-refuting propositions must be logical falsehoods.¹⁸ It is the status of another assumption that appears to me more problematic here: on this reconstruction the conclusion (4) would be a consequence (καὶ οὕτω) not of (3), the apodosis of the preceding conditional sentence, but of the whole conditional, <3.2>, together with the implicit <3.3>. Now, <3.3> is a tautology of the classical propositional calculus

$$(CM) (p \rightarrow \neg p) \rightarrow \neg p$$

often referred to by the specialists as *Consequentia Mirabilis* ('the marvellous consequence'): any proposition implying its own contradictory is false¹⁹ (and necessarily so). To be precise, the name *Consequentia Mirabilis* (attested for the first time in the seventeenth century among Polish Jesuit scholars)²⁰ was primarily attributed to the formula $(\neg p \rightarrow p) \rightarrow p$, also dubbed *Lex Clavii* ('Clavius' law': any proposition implied by its own contradictory is true), and only consequently to CM above, which follows from it by a simple substitution of the variables and the law of double negation. Hereafter I shall use the label 'CM' both for $(p \rightarrow \neg p) \rightarrow \neg p$ and for $(\neg p \rightarrow p) \rightarrow p$.²¹

¹⁸ See the left column in the derivation, where the assumptions on which each step depends are listed. Given the assumption (2), the argument above does not suffer the same weakness as we encountered in previous attempts at 'logical' reconstructions of ancient self-refutation arguments: since it appears to someone that $(\neg p)$ not every appearance is true, then it is in fact impossible that every appearance is true. For even if all the other appearances should be true, at least the appearance that $\neg p$ will not be true, but Liar-paradoxical.

¹⁹ In this paraphrase of CM 'is false' is used only as a convenient method of generalising about negation. However, if one accepts the basic semantic principle $\neg p \rightarrow Fp$, CM can be reformulated with a falsehood predicate: $(p \rightarrow \neg p) \rightarrow Fp$. To be precise, this reformulation seems to be the one required in the argument above to infer the conclusion (4):

1	(1)	$(\forall p)Ap \rightarrow Tp$	Protagoras' thesis
2	(2)	$A(\neg(\forall p)Ap \rightarrow Tp)$	Assumption
1,2	(3)	$T(\neg(\forall p)Ap \rightarrow Tp)$	From (1) and (2)
1,2	<3.1>	$\neg(\forall p)Ap \rightarrow Tp$	From (3), by $Tp \rightarrow p$
2	<3.2>	$((\forall p)Ap \rightarrow Tp) \rightarrow (\neg(\forall p)Ap \rightarrow Tp)$	From (1) and <3.1>
3,3	<3.3>	$(p \rightarrow \neg p) \rightarrow Fp$	CM
2, 3,3	(4)	$F(\neg(\forall p)Ap \rightarrow Tp)$	From <3.2> and <3.3>

²⁰ Cf. Łukasiewicz 1970: 168n19.

²¹ Notice, however, that the two formulae are not equivalent in all logical systems: in intuitionistic logic, for example, only $(p \rightarrow \neg p) \rightarrow \neg p$ is valid, whereas $(\neg p \rightarrow p) \rightarrow p$ is not. For a comprehensive

CM has made a number of cursory appearances in the pages of the previous chapters: for example, it was used by Mackie in his formal analysis of the absolute self-refutation of 'Nothing is true' (p. 20) and by certain scholars in their reconstructions of Plato's anti-Protagorean argument in the *Theaetetus* (p. 60) and of some Aristotelian arguments against Antiphrasis in *Metaphysics* Γ (pp. 78 and 88). For expository convenience I postponed our discussion of the role of CM in ancient self-refutation arguments to this more advanced stage of our inquiry; it is now time to give it due attention, starting from T23.

Περίτροπή has often been interpreted as an ancient form of CM: according to Barnes, for example, 'περίτροπή... turns on the exotic truth that anything which implies its own negation is itself false' (1997b: 31). In the remainder of this section I shall suggest some reasons for doubting the correctness of any reconstruction of ancient περίτροπή arguments such as the one in T23 along the lines of CM. To begin with, and more trivially, no formulation of CM appears in our passage. To this objection one might reply that of course CM does not need to be stated explicitly, because it is not used as a premiss in the argument, but as an inferential schema $(p \rightarrow \neg p \vdash \neg p)$: any attentive and competent reader should recognise the obvious validity of this schema as what justifies the inference from a conditional formed by contradictories, <3.2>, to its consequent, the conclusion (4). But is it so obvious that any attentive and competent ancient reader would have easily filled in the blanks in the argument with the *Mirabilis*? Not only is CM never *presented* as a logical law or principle by our sources for Hellenistic logic²² or, more broadly, for ancient logic, but no argument is attested in which it is unequivocally *employed*: our T23 has been seen by historians of logic as one of the few and most promising philosophical texts for an attempt at tracing back the use, if not the theoretical formulation, of CM to antiquity. Although this might be partly imputed to an objective difficulty in univocally translating into logical form arguments expressed in a

history of *Consequentia Mirabilis* cf. Nuchelmans 1991: 124–37 and Bellissima and Pagli 1996. I shall not deal here with the non-trivial question whether *Consequentia Mirabilis* itself has always been understood as something equivalent to the law of the classical propositional calculus CM throughout the history of philosophy.

²² In her excellent reconstruction of Stoic syllogistic, Bobzien puts the *Mirabilis* in a list of sequents that have such a form that no compounds of propositions of that form 'would be syllogisms in the Stoic system, although all of them are correct sequents in PC [sc. classical propositional calculus]'. She also claims not to have found any documentation in the sources 'that the Stoics accepted either all corresponding conditionals of a form as true, or a metalogical principle that in some way corresponds to the sequent' (1996: 183–4). These sequents (including the *Mirabilis*) cannot be analysed into Stoic indemonstrables either (at least according to Bobzien's convincing reconstruction of the Stoic *themata*).

natural language (just consider our present hesitation),²³ to say confidently that an ancient philosophical reader of T23 would have easily understood that the conclusion (4) is validly inferred through CM may mean providing him, anachronistically, with a tool he could have been unable to handle. I shall not deal here with the question of whether CM was used by ancient mathematicians (certainly they did not theorise it). Starting from Clavius, many interpreters of the *Elements* have seen CM at work in Euclid's proof of proposition 9.12,²⁴ but this reading is itself controversial, and might also be seen as an anachronistic retrojection on to Euclid's text of a later logical rule, with ensuing distortion of it, along the same lines as happened with various ancient philosophical texts.²⁵

The suggestion that CM is the underlying inferential schema which allows us to infer (4) directly from <3.2> is liable to another objection: deductions from a single premiss did not meet particular enthusiasm – to put it mildly – in antiquity, at least as far as we can judge from the two most influential ancient logical constructions, Aristotle's syllogistic and Chrysippus' dialectic. Aristotle's phrasing of the definition of συλλογισμός as 'a λόγος in which, certain *things* having being laid down, something different from the *things* laid down follows of necessity because of *their* being so' (*APr.* 1.1, 24b18–21)²⁶ seems to exclude single-premiss deductions,²⁷ while the Stoic Antipater (second century BC) is reported to have endorsed an *unorthodox* view by allowing single-premiss arguments (μονολήμματοι λόγοι).²⁸

²³ Commenting on T23, Bellissima and Pagli write: 'Non c'è dubbio che lo schema di ragionamento, effettivamente parallelo a quello del *Teeteto* platonico... ripercorra le linee della *Consequentia Mirabilis* nella forma $(A \rightarrow \neg A) \rightarrow \neg A$: se l'affermazione è vera, allora anche la sua negazione è vera e quindi l'affermazione è falsa. Risalirebbe pertanto a Democrito il primo esempio di *Consequentia Mirabilis*. Rimane il dubbio della effettiva coscienza di essere di fronte a una procedura logica generale' (1996: 178). It should be clear from my reconstruction of the *Theaetetus* argument in section 2 of chapter 4 that I do not agree that it relies on CM.

In section 2 of chapter 5 I have reconstructed Aristotle's treatment of the 'self-destroying' statements 'Everything is true' and 'Everything is false' at *Metaph.* 1.8, 1012b13–22 (T18 on p. 76) in a straightforward dialectical way which does not presuppose any unstated application of CM. A different reconstruction, based on CM, would fit the textual details rather poorly. In section 6.2 below I shall analyse another passage which might be interpreted as involving CM but is, I shall argue, best read otherwise.

²⁴ Cf. Vailati 1904, Nuchelmans 1991: 128–30, Bellissima and Pagli 1996: 27–32.

²⁵ I thank Fabio Acerbi for allowing me to read a section of his unpublished monograph *La logica nella matematica antica*, in which on the basis of close textual and logical analysis he argues that Euclid's proofs of propositions 8.6, 9.12 and 9.36 do *not* rely on *Consequentia Mirabilis*.

²⁶ συλλογισμός δὲ ἐστὶ λόγος ἐν ᾧ τεθέντων τινῶν ἕτερόν τι τῶν κειμένων ἔξ ἀνάγκης συμβαίνει τῷ ταῦτα εἶναι.

²⁷ Cf. Alex. Aphr. in *APr.* 17, 10–18, 8. For Aristotle's other formulations of the definition of συλλογισμός cf. *Top.* 1.1, 100a25–7; *SE* 1, 164b27–165a2; *Rhet.* 1.2, 1356b16–17.

²⁸ Cf. e.g. S.E. *PH* 2.167, *M* 8.443; Apul. *Int.* 272.

To avoid these difficulties, one could attempt a slightly different reconstruction of the argument in T23, involving not CM, but a distinct, albeit strictly related, inferential schema. On this interpretation, after <3.1> that argument would proceed as follows:

- | | | | |
|-----|-------|---|---|
| 2 | <3.2> | If every appearance is true,
not every appearance is true | From (1) and <3.1> |
| 3.3 | <3.3> | If not every appearance is
true, not every appearance is
true | Duplicated conditional |
| 3.4 | <3.4> | Either every appearance is
true or not every appearance
is true | By Excluded Middle |
| 2 | <3.5> | Not every appearance is true | From <3.2>, <3.3>,
<3.4>, by constructive
dilemma |
| 2 | (4) | It is false that every
appearance is true | From <3.5>, by
$\neg p \rightarrow Fp$ |

Although such a reconstruction would require us to supply even more implicit reasoning than before, which is sufficient to make it rather questionable as an exegesis of the text, the inferential pattern to the conclusion would be in accordance with a schema which, apparently, was recognised as sound and used in antiquity and which occurs elsewhere in Sextus' *corpus*:

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| (a) | $p \rightarrow \neg p$ | <3.2> |
| (b) | $\neg p \rightarrow \neg p$ | <3.3> |
| (c) | $p \vee \neg p$ | <3.4> |
| <hr/> | | |
| (d) | $\neg p$ | <3.5> ²⁹ |

This form of constructive dilemma is strictly related to CM: it might be seen as an extended or 'watered-down' version of it, in which the two tautological extra premisses (b) and (c) are spelled out.

But there is a final obstacle which such an interpretation of T23's argument must overcome: could the key premiss 'If every appearance is true,

²⁹ I shall argue below and in part II, chapters 10–11 that the alleged ancient instances of this schema can be reinterpreted in a different way.

not every appearance is true', if taken at face value,³⁰ ever be true? More generally, is it possible for any conditional of the form $p \rightarrow \neg p$ to be true? If one accepts the truth-conditions for 'material implication' typical of (modern) classical calculi, the answer is, of course, 'yes': $p \rightarrow \neg p$ is true whenever p is false. Those truth-conditions were accepted in antiquity by the dialectician Philo (late fourth – early third centuries BC)³¹ and, most probably, by some Stoics.³² A different analysis, proposed by Philo's teacher, Diodorus Cronus, required the present impossibility of p (i.e. in Diodorean terms, the falsehood of p now and at any time from now on) for a conditional of the form $p \rightarrow \neg p$ to be true.³³ On both conceptions nothing would prevent the conditional <3.2> 'If every appearance is true, not every appearance is true' from being true. However, there is strong, albeit circumstantial, evidence to make the case that the two most influential ancient conceptions of sound implication and conditional would have barred that possibility. In modern discussions of non-classical logics, such as numerous systems of 'relevant' and 'connexive' logic, one non-classical thesis is sometimes singled out as distinctive:

$$(AT) \quad \neg(p \rightarrow \neg p) \quad \neg(\neg p \rightarrow p)$$

no proposition implies or is implied by its own negation.

McCall, who propounded one of the first systems of 'connexive logic', characterised precisely by a brand of 'connexive implication' such that 'no proposition connexively implies or is implied by its own negation' (1966: 415), baptised this property 'Aristotle's Thesis' (hereafter, also AT). This choice was not random; according to McCall the following passage from the second book of the *Prior Analytics* testifies to Aristotle's endorsement of AT:

T24 It is impossible that the same thing should be necessitated by the being and by the not-being of the same thing. I mean, for example, <that it is impossible> that B should necessarily be large if A is white and that B should necessarily be large if A is not white . . . If then B is not large, A cannot be white. But if, if A is not white, it is necessary that B should be large, it necessarily results that if B is not large, B itself is large; but this is impossible. (*APr.* 2.4, 57b3–14)³⁴

³⁰ I.e. not as an elliptical formulation of a dialectical argument, or as shorthand for 'If every appearance is true and it appears that not every appearance is true, then not every appearance is true', which has the form $(p \wedge q) \rightarrow \neg p$.

³¹ Cf. e.g. S.E. *PH* 2.110. For the question of whether 'dialectician' should have the upper case 'D' here cf. Sedley 1977.

³² Cf. e.g. S.E. *PH* 2.104.

³³ Cf. e.g. S.E. *PH* 2.110–11. On Diodorus' modalities cf. Bobzien 1993: 69–75.

³⁴ τοῦ δ' αὐτοῦ ὄντος καὶ μὴ ὄντος ἀδύνατον ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἶναι τὸ αὐτό· λέγω δ' οἷον τοῦ Α ὄντος λευκοῦ τὸ Β εἶναι μέγα ἐξ ἀνάγκης, καὶ μὴ ὄντος λευκοῦ τοῦ Α τὸ Β εἶναι μέγα ἐξ

AT seems to be endorsed by Aristotle at the very end of the passage and used to prove the 'impossibility' of two implications of the form $p \rightarrow q$ and $\neg p \rightarrow q$ (which was baptised by McCall 'Boethius' Thesis', hereafter also BT):³⁵

Suppose that both (a) $p \rightarrow q$ and (b) $\neg p \rightarrow q$	
If (a) $p \rightarrow q$, then (c) $\neg q \rightarrow \neg p$	By contraposition (cf. 57b9–11)
If (c) $\neg q \rightarrow \neg p$ and (b) $\neg p \rightarrow q$, then (d) $\neg q \rightarrow q$	By transitivity (cf. 57b6–9)
But (d) $\neg q \rightarrow q$ is impossible	AT
Therefore, $\neg(\text{both } p \rightarrow q \text{ and } \neg p \rightarrow q)$	BT

As William Kneale noticed, 'if Aristotle was right in asserting this, there could never be any valid argument in the pattern of the *consequentia mirabilis*' (Kneale's bold conclusion was that Aristotle was certainly wrong, and 'Aristotle's thesis' was indeed Aristotle's *error*).³⁶ No constructive dilemma in the form presented on p. 105 could be sound either, since its first premiss would be false by AT.³⁷ More generally, any attempt at proving the necessary falsehood of a proposition (e.g. Protagoras' or Antiphrasis' theses) starting from the fact that it implies its own contradictory would

ἀνάγκης . . . τοῦ δὲ Β μὴ ὄντος μεγάλου τὸ Α οὐχ οἷον τε λευκὸν εἶναι. τοῦ δὲ Α μὴ ὄντος λευκοῦ εἰ ἀνάγκη τὸ Β μέγα εἶναι, συμβαίνει ἐξ ἀνάγκης τοῦ Β μεγάλου μὴ ὄντος αὐτὸ τὸ Β εἶναι μέγα· τοῦτο δ' ἀδύνατον.

³⁵ McCall chose the label 'Boethius' Thesis' with reference to Boeth. *Hyp. Syll.* 2.6.1. I can only observe in passing here that BT, in its form $\neg((p \rightarrow q) \wedge (p \rightarrow \neg q))$ (which follows, by contraposition, from the one used by Aristotle in T24), would invalidate that form of single-assumption *reductio ad impossibile* which appears to be at work in Zeno's argument against plurality according to the description that Plato makes of it at *Prmd.* 127d–128a. For Zeno's apparent caution in the dialogue with regard to the positive prospects of that argument pattern cf. 128b–c; in fact, as Barnes comments, the historical 'Zeno's surviving fragments contain no *reductio*: he takes an hypothesis and infers an absurdity from it; but he never makes the characteristic move of *reductio*, the inference to the falsity of the hypothesis. He argues "If P, then Q", where Q states some absurdity; but he does not explicitly infer the falsity of P. In other words, he does not use *reductio ad absurdum* as a technique for disproof' (1982a: 236). What Barnes maintains here concerning Zeno's arguments and *reductio ad absurdum* is very similar to what I am arguing here with reference to ancient περιτροπή and *Consequentia Mirabilis*.

³⁶ 'On this occasion Aristotle wrote more than was needed and fell into error' (Kneale 1957: 66). Łukasiewicz (1957: 48–51) and Patzig (1959: 191) share Kneale's opinion. For a more sympathetic approach to Aristotle's argument, based on the request that the antecedent be somehow explanatory of the consequent, cf. Smith 1989: 190–1. For analysis of the passage cf. also Patzig 1959, Mignucci 1969: 610–14. Some further clue to Aristotle's acceptance of AT could perhaps be found in *APr.* 2.15, 64b7–17.

³⁷ $\neg(\neg q \rightarrow q)$ entails $\neg(q \rightarrow \neg q)$ provided one accepts contraposition and double negation. Premises (a) and (b) would also violate, jointly, BT.

be a non-starter. Any such argument would be, at most, 'degenerately' valid, i.e. a valid argument which cannot be sound because in virtue of its logical form it cannot have all true premisses.

One could object that T24 alone offers insufficient grounds for establishing Aristotle's considered commitment to AT and BT:³⁸ in part II, chapter II we shall examine a famous Aristotelian argument which appears to be flatly inconsistent with Aristotle's acceptance of AT and BT. Moreover, even conceding that T23's anti-Protagorean argument, in its non-dialectical reconstructions, would not appeal to Aristotelian palates, it still could be perfectly fine for readers with different logical tastes. In response to this, it is important to realise that the 'non-classical' attitude towards implication which seems to emerge from T24 was not isolated in the ancient logical landscape. There are compelling reasons to believe that the (most likely Chrysippean)³⁹ conception of the conditional proposition (συνημμένον) dubbed συνάρτησις ('connectedness') by some of our sources, which seems to have been Stoic orthodoxy for some time,⁴⁰ also involved the truth of AT. Here is the definition of συνάρτησις reported by Sextus:

T25 Those who introduce συνάρτησις say that a conditional is sound when the contradictory of its consequent is in conflict (μάχεται) with its antecedent; according to them, the conditionals mentioned above [*sc.* 'If it is day, I converse' and 'If there are not indivisible elements of the things, there are indivisible elements of the things']⁴¹ will be unsound, while 'If it is day, it is day' will be true.⁴² (PH 2.111)

Admittedly, the falsehood of the conditional 'If there are not indivisible elements of the things, there are indivisible elements of the things' on the συνάρτησις conception is insufficient to establish that *every* conditional of the same form $\neg p \rightarrow p$ must be false on that conception.⁴³ However, another Sextan passage suggests the general validity of AT for συνάρτησις:

³⁸ Nuchelmans (1991: 16) and Nasti De Vincentis (1998: 60n25, 2002: 97–8) suggest that in T24 Aristotle was thinking only of those cases in which the consequent of 'If not-*p*, then *p*' is contingent, thus AT was not intended to express a general logical law (cf. also Geach 1963). I am inclined to agree with Kneale that 'it is clear from the context that Aristotle thought of his example as representing all propositions indifferently' (1957: 66), without agreeing with him that this was an error on Aristotle's part (a position now also endorsed by Nasti De Vincentis 2004).

³⁹ Cf. Frede 1974: 82–3.

⁴⁰ Most notably, the συνάρτησις truth-conditions for conditionals are the only ones presented by Diogenes Laertius in his testimony on Stoic logic (7.73), although in the absence of the label συνάρτησις itself.

⁴¹ These conditionals would be true, respectively, for Philo (PH 2.110) and Diodorus (PH 2.111).

⁴² οἱ δὲ τὴν συνάρτησιν εἰσάγοντες ὑγιᾶς εἶναι φασὶν συνημμένον, ὅταν τὸ ἀντικείμενον τῷ ἐν αὐτῷ λήγοντι μάχεται τῷ ἐν αὐτῷ ἡγουμένῳ· καθ' οὗς τὰ μὲν εἰρημένα συνημμένα ἔσται μοχθηρά, ἐκεῖνο δὲ ἀληθές· εἰ ἡμέρα ἔστιν, ἡμέρα ἔστιν.

⁴³ Pace Smiley 1998: vol. II, 600 and Gourinat 2000: 226–7.

T26 But it is impossible, according to what they⁴⁴ say, that a sound conditional is composed of conflicting propositions.⁴⁵ (PH 2.189)

Since it is clear from the bulk of our evidence that for the Stoics contradictory propositions are always in mutual conflict (μάχη) too, the thesis expressed in T26, which I shall call 'Chrysippus' Thesis' (hereafter, CT), appears to be strong evidence that AT conveys a genuine property of συνάρτησις. The reliability of this testimony, the importance of which was first underscored by Nasti De Vincentis (1981), has been questioned,⁴⁶ but seems to find corroboration in other sources which can be thought to provide trustworthy, albeit indirect, information about Stoic logic. I cannot enter here the intricacies of this debate, which I have discussed at length elsewhere;⁴⁷ let us consider just a few additional pieces of evidence:

T27 I call 'consequents' those things which follow something of necessity . . . For whatever follows any single thing, that of necessity is connected (*cohaeret*) with that thing; and whatever is in conflict (*repugnat*) is of such a nature that it can never be connected (*cohaerere*).⁴⁸ (Cic. Top. 13.53)

T28 Where one can use the disjunctive connective (ὁ διαζευκτικός), one cannot use the conditional one (ὁ συναπτικός); and where one can use the conditional one, one cannot use the disjunctive one. And it is clear from what has been said that the announcement made by the conditional <connectives> – but also by the conjunctive <ones> – is in conflict with that of the disjunctive <ones> . . . For just as between the disjuncts there is no consequence, there is no consequence between the conjuncts either.⁴⁹ (Apoll. Dysc. De Conj. 218, II–16)

T29 Moreover, the antecedents and the consequents cannot leave one another, nor can conflicting propositions (*repugnantia*) be connected (*cohaerere*) one to another; the former are necessarily connected (*connexa*), the latter disconnected (*inconnexa*).⁵⁰ (Boeth. in Cic. Top. 349, 40–2)

⁴⁴ 'They' are 'the dogmatists' (PH 2.185), but the context of the passage indicates that the reference is to philosophers who adopt the συνάρτησις truth-conditions.

⁴⁵ ἀδύνατον δὲ ἔστι κατ' αὐτοὺς συνημμένον ὑγιᾶς εἶναι ἐκ μαχομένων ἀξιωματῶν συνεστῶς.

⁴⁶ Cf. especially Stopper 1983: 281–2.

⁴⁷ Cf. Castagnoli 2004b, 2004c, 2009; cf. also Nasti De Vincentis 1981, 1984, 1998, 1999, 2002; Stopper 1983: 281–6. The idea that AT conveys a genuine property of συνάρτησις is also endorsed by O'Toole and Jennings (2004: 476–95).

⁴⁸ Ea enim dico consequentia quae rem necessario consequuntur . . . Quidquid enim sequitur quamque rem, id cohaeret cum re necessario; et quidquid repugnat, id eius modi est ut cohaerere numquam possit.

⁴⁹ ἐφ' οὗ γὰρ ὁ διαζευκτικός, ἐκεῖ οὐχ ὁ συναπτικός· καὶ ὅπου ὁ συναπτικός, ἐκεῖ οὐκέτι ὁ διαζευκτικός. καὶ σαφές ἐκ τοῦ προκειμένου, ὡς μάχεται ἡ τε τῶν συναπτικῶν ἐπαγγελία, καὶ ἔτι τῶν συμπλεκτικῶν, πρὸς τὴν τῶν διαζευκτικῶν . . . ὡς γὰρ οἱ διαζευκτικοὶ οὐκ ἐν ἀκολουθίᾳ, οὐδ' οἱ συμπλεκτικοί.

⁵⁰ Amplius, quae antecedentia sunt et consequentia, relinquere sese non possunt, nec sibi repugnantia cohaerere, et sunt necessario sibimet connexa vel inconnexa.

In these texts, which span various centuries, Cicero (106–43 BC), Apollonius Dyscolus (second century AD) and Boethius (c. 480–525 AD) explicitly report (T27 and T29) or clearly imply (T28)⁵¹ that a true conditional cannot be formed of conflicting clauses (CT), and thus, *a fortiori*, of contradictory clauses (AT).⁵²

One could object that what holds good for the truth of conditional propositions need not hold good for the validity of inferences: some Stoics might have accepted that no true conditional could be formed of contradictories without thereby denying that a proposition can entail its own contradictory (and that, if it does so, it must be necessarily false). This objection would cut no ice: the Stoics endorsed (with no exception, as far as we know) the ‘principle of conditionalisation’, according to which an argument is sound if and only if the corresponding conditional having the conjunction of the premisses as its antecedent and the conclusion as its consequent is true.⁵³ Conditional truth and validity cannot be divorced in a Stoic setting (while they do not even seem to be easily distinguishable in an Aristotelian one).

Cicero’s, Apollonius’ and Boethius’ claims to reliability as sources for Stoic logic could be disputed and will require, of course, careful examination case by case. I limit myself to noticing here that this difficulty need not be damaging for our present purposes: if AT is attested by these sources but did not necessarily derive in all cases from Stoic logic, this could suggest that AT was endorsed by ancient logicians even more widely than anticipated.

There is strong evidence, then, to conclude that any reconstruction of T23’s argument along the lines of CM or cognate inference schemas would have been unpalatable in antiquity for a large audience (which

⁵¹ We know that for the Stoics two propositions can form a true disjunction if and only if there is conflict between them. Since Apollonius reveals to us that the members of a true disjunction could never be the clauses of a true conditional proposition, we can conclude that conflicting propositions cannot form a true conditional (CT).

⁵² Nasti De Vincentis refers to Cicero’s T27, but he maintains (I believe with an excess of caution) that it cannot be accepted as a straightforward source for CT because in Cicero’s jargon it is not clear that συνάρτησις is sufficient for ‘coherence’ (*cohaeret, cohaerere*) (1999: 18n56). Galen (*Inst. Log.* 14.7) might be yet another source for CT: the three classes of things among which (1) there is conflict (μᾶχη), (2) there is consequence (ἀκολουθία) and (3) there is neither conflict nor consequence appear to be treated not only as exhaustive, but also as mutually *exclusive*, although Galen is not explicit on this point. For close scrutiny of all these passages and their significance cf. Nasti De Vincentis 2002, 2006, Castagnoli 2004c, 2009, Barnes 2005: 286–8.

If AT holds good for συνάρτησις, given the ascending order of strength of the conceptions of conditional presented by Sextus at PH 2.110–12, the fourth and last one, ἐμφασις (‘manifestation’), should have been governed by AT as well.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. S.E. PH 2.137; D.L. 7.77.

could have included Aristotle, mainstream Chrysippean Stoicism,⁵⁴ and late antique logicians), and for serious logical reasons: some interpreters seem to forget too easily that the laws of what we often call ‘classical logic’, i.e. the logic of the beginning of the twentieth century AD, need not coincide with those of *ancient* logic. If we add to this the indisputable datum that such a reconstruction fits Sextus’ actual wording rather poorly anyway, I hope I have constructed a compelling case for sticking to a purely dialectical interpretation of T23’s περιτροπή which does not require that Protagoras’ thesis is proved to be false in virtue of the fact that it entails its own contradictory (further evidence in support of this conclusion will be considered in the next section). But, then, Burnyeat’s presupposition that dialectically self-refuting propositions are (also) somehow falsified becomes dubious, and in light of my explanation of the status of CM and AT in antiquity his suggestion that, generally, in a περιτροπή argument ‘starting out with “*p*” we deduce “not-*p*” and so conclude that the original premise was false’,⁵⁵ which sounds like a description of CM,⁵⁶ turns out to be suspect too. One could object that I have shown, at most, that ‘logical’ περιτροπή, intended as something akin to CM, was only available to some ancient philosophical schools or individuals (those which did not endorse AT, because of Philonian or Diodorean leanings, for example). As Burnyeat himself correctly points out, however, ‘evidently *peritrope* is a commonplace of later Greek controversy, available to disputants of any persuasion to confute the other side of the debate’ (1976a: 57).

Another point of disagreement, which will emerge more clearly in the next section, concerns Burnyeat’s individuation of some περιτροπή arguments in which the dialectical aspect plays a limited role, or no role at all: as we have seen, dialectical περιτροπή is, according to Burnyeat, only one species of ancient self-refutation,⁵⁷ along with others, like absolute and pragmatic self-refutation.⁵⁸ Before proceeding to the inspection of some

⁵⁴ Before we accept AT as a genuine Stoic thesis, however, it is necessary to explain how this can be reconciled with some attested arguments which are apparently incompatible with it but are usually attributed to the Stoics (cf. PH 2.131, 186; M 8.281, 466). I shall address this question in part II, chapter 10.

⁵⁵ Burnyeat 1976a: 48 (italics mine).

⁵⁶ Compare also Burnyeat’s remark that single-premiss reversals have ‘the form “(*p* → not-*p*) → not-*p*”’ (1976a: 49). For reasons which should now be clear, I do not agree with McPherran’s analysis of T23’s argument as an instance of *absolute* self-refutation (1987: 293n8), if by ‘absolute self-refutation’ we intend something along the same lines as Mackie’s analysis which I have discussed in chapter 2.

⁵⁷ In Burnyeat’s own terms, dialectical self-refutation is an ‘extension of the notion of self-refutation’ (1976a: 59), i.e. of Mackie’s analysis of this notion, and not a correction or replacement of it.

⁵⁸ In his analysis Burnyeat clarifies that pragmatic περιτροπή also often occurs in dialectical contexts, but the fact that ‘dialectical self-refutation’ is chosen as the name of a species of περιτροπή

of these arguments, however, let us consider briefly three other Sextan passages which replicate and confirm some fundamental features I have detected in T23:

T30 If truths are things which appear only, they will say (λέξουσιν) either that all things which appear are true, or that some are. If <they say> all, the λόγος incurs reversal (περιτρέπεται); for it appears to some people that nothing is true.⁵⁹ (PH 2.88)

T31 Either all things which appear and all those unclear are true, or some things which appear and some unclear. Now if all are, the λόγος will again incur reversal (περιτραπήσεται), it being granted as true (ἀληθοῦς διδομένου) also that nothing is true.⁶⁰ (PH 2.91)

T32 And if the 'something' is true, everything will be true; from which it is in turn concluded that nothing is true, since this itself (I mean that nothing is true), being a thing, is true.⁶¹ (PH 2.86)⁶²

In T30 a dialectical exchange is unquestionably presupposed: περιτροπή is the result of some interlocutors opting to say (λέξουσιν) that whatever

risks obscuring this point. Burnyeat juxtaposes, without investigating their differences, the general, non-dialectical account of περιτροπή which I have criticised above and the following, different dialectical account: 'For precisely what self-refutation consists in is a reversal whereby *advancing* a proposal *commits* one to its contradictory opposite' (1976a: 49, italics mine). The latter account seems to suggest that *every* περιτροπή argument has a dialectical setting, but Burnyeat's subsequent discussion seems to exclude this for cases of 'single-premise reversals' (Burnyeat's label for Mackie's absolute self-refutations).

⁵⁹ εἰ μὲν οὖν φαινόμενα μόνον ἐστὶ τὰ ἀληθῆ, ἦτοι πάντα τὰ φαινόμενα λέξουσιν εἶναι ἀληθῆ ἢ τινὰ. καὶ εἰ μὲν πάντα, περιτρέπεται ὁ λόγος· φαίνεται γὰρ τισὶ τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι ἀληθές.

⁶⁰ ἦτοι γὰρ πάντα τὰ τε φαινόμενα καὶ τὰ ἀδηλά ἐστιν ἀληθῆ, ἢ τινὰ φαινόμενα καὶ τινὰ ἀδηλά. εἰ μὲν οὖν πάντα, πάλιν περιτραπήσεται ὁ λόγος, ἀληθοῦς εἶναι διδομένου καὶ τοῦ μὴδὲν εἶναι ἀληθές.

⁶¹ εἰ δὲ ἀληθές ἐστι τὸ τι πάντα ἔσται ἀληθῆ· ὥς συνεισάγεται πάλιν τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι ἀληθές, εἴγε καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο τί ὑπάρχον (λέγω δὲ τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι ἀληθές) ἀληθές ἐστιν.

⁶² For περιτροπή arguments with analogous structure, but not involving theses concerning truth and falsehood, cf. PH 2.64: 'They will judge the things either with all the senses and everyone's intellects, or with <only> some. But if one says with all, one will require the impossible, for there is clearly much conflict among senses and intellects, and in particular, since Gorgias' intellect affirms that one must attend neither to the senses nor to the intellect, the thesis will be reversed (περιτραπήσεται ὁ λόγος)' (ἦτοι πάσαις ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι καὶ ταῖς πάντων διανοίαις κρινοῦσι τὰ πράγματα ἢ τισίν. ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν πάσαις λέξει τις, ἀδύνατα ἀξιώσει τοσαύτης μάχης ἐν ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι καὶ ταῖς διανοίαις ἐμφαινόμενης, ἄλλως τε καὶ ἐπεὶ τῆς Γοργίου διανοίας ἀπόφασις ἐστὶ τὸ μὴ δεῖν μῆτε αἰσθῆσαι μῆτε διανοίᾳ προσέχειν, περιτραπήσεται ὁ λόγος). PH 2.76: 'Then either we shall find every appearance credible and decide in virtue of it, or <only> some. If every, it is clear that we shall also find credible Xenias' appearance in virtue of which he said that all the appearances are non-credible, and the thesis will be reversed (περιτραπήσεται ὁ λόγος) into the non-credibility of all appearances' (οὐκοῦν ἦτοι πάσῃ φαντασίᾳ πιστεύομεν <καὶ κατ' αὐτὴν ἐπικρινόμεν, ἢ τινι. ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν πάσῃ, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τῇ Ξενιάδου φαντασίᾳ πιστεύομεν>, καθ' ἣν ἔλεγε πάσας τὰς φαντασίας ἀπίστους εἶναι, καὶ περιτραπήσεται ὁ λόγος εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι πάσας τὰς φαντασίας). In the latter passage (on which cf. Hankinson 1995: 179) we are informed explicitly of what we have presumed all along, that the περιτροπή of a λόγος is a reversal into its contradictory.

appears is true; what gets reversed, presumably into the contradictory admission,⁶³ is exactly what they have said (ὁ λόγος).

In T31 the reason why the λόγος that all appearances are true incurs reversal seems to be, simply, that one who proposes it is thereby *granting* as true something which amounts to its contradictory (that nothing is true).⁶⁴ Nothing is suggested about the possible implications of this concession for the truth-value of that λόγος.

In T32 'Nothing is true' cannot be meant to be the true conclusion of a proof by CM starting from the assumption that 'Everything is true', but must be an unwelcome consequence of that undischarged assumption: if everything were true, then nothing would be true. Once again, no further step involving CM (e.g. 'therefore, not everything is true, and so the Stoic "something" is not true') is presented or implied in the text. One could object that this time no dialectical framework is suggested either. If one explores the broader context of T32, however, that framework is easily supplied:

T33 Moreover, the 'something', which they [*sc.* the Stoics] say to be the highest genus of all, is either true or false or neither false nor true or both false and true. If then they will say (φήσουσιν) that it is false, they will be admitting (ὁμολογήσουσιν) that everything is false (PH 2.86).⁶⁵ ... T32 And if the 'something' is true, everything will be true ...

Although at the beginning of T33 the four logical possibilities are listed in an abstract combinatorial way, it is not the logical consequences of the first possibility that are analysed immediately below, but the *admissions* to which the Stoics would be bound by accepting it and saying that their *summun genus*, the 'something', is false. Symmetry clearly requires us to understand in the same way the second horn of the quadrilemma in T32: 'And if <the Stoics will say that> the 'something' is true, <they will be thereby admitting that> everything is true; from which it is in

⁶³ From 'All things which appear are true' and 'It appears to some people that nothing is true', the conclusion can be inferred that 'It is true that nothing is true', which is not the contradictory of 'All things which appear are true', but clearly implies it. One could obtain a more straightforward argument in which the proposal that 'all things which appear are true' is reversed directly into its own contradictory by translating φαίνεται γὰρ τισὶ τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι ἀληθές as 'for it appears to some people that *none* [*sc.* of the things which appear] is true'.

⁶⁴ Just as for T30, a more straightforward reversal into the contradictory could be obtained if we understood ἀληθοῦς εἶναι διδομένου καὶ τοῦ μὴδὲν εἶναι ἀληθές as 'it being granted as true also that *none* [*sc.* of the things which appear and of those which are unclear] is true'.

⁶⁵ καὶ μὴν τὸ τι, ὅπερ φασὶν εἶναι πάντων γενικώτατον, ἦτοι ἀληθές ἢ ψευδὲς ἐστὶν ἢ οὔτε ψευδὲς οὔτε ἀληθές, ἢ καὶ ψευδὲς καὶ ἀληθές. εἰ μὲν οὖν ψευδὲς αὐτὸ εἶναι φήσουσιν, ὁμολογήσουσιν ὅτι πάντα ἐστὶ ψευδῆ.

turn concluded that <they must concede that> nothing is true.' We accepted this sort of ellipticity as the most convincing explanation for certain otherwise problematic features of the *Dissoi Logoi* argument against IT (TI, chapter 3), of Socrates' dilemma against MD in the *Theaetetus* (T7, section 2.2 of chapter 4), and of Aristotle's 'stock-objection' against Antiphrasis in *Metaphysics* Γ 8 (TI8, section 2 of chapter 5); we begin appreciating now that such conciseness is a feature of Sextus' own *usus scribendi* too, as will be confirmed by our analysis in the next section.

6.2 'NOTHING IS TRUE': TWO DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR REVERSAL (M 8.55 AND 7.399)

In the previous section I noted that according to Burnyeat there are instances of ancient περιτροπή that fit the description of absolute self-refutation: these are 'single-premise reversals' exemplifying the 'strictly self-refuting case of a thesis falsified by its own content' (1976a: 59) through the pattern of a *Consequentia Mirabilis* of 'the form $(p \rightarrow \text{not-}p) \rightarrow \text{not-}p$ '⁶⁶ (49). I shall examine now two of these arguments in Sextus, to check whether the modern conception of absolute self-refutation, both in its bare bones, as just described, and in the fuller details of Mackie's influential formalisation, succeeds in capturing their logic.⁶⁷

Let us start with the first:

τ34 Now, we have shown above that those who say that all things are false (τοὺς μὲν πάντα λέγοντας ψευδῆ) incur reversal (περιτρεπομένους). For if all things are false, 'All things are false', being one of all things, will be false. And if 'All things are false' is false, its contradictory, 'Not all things are false', will be true. Therefore, if all things are false, not all things are false.⁶⁸ (M 8.55)

I suggest that actually this passage contains strong evidence against interpreting περιτροπή as a form of absolute self-refutation. To begin with, it is not the proposition 'All things are false' that is charged with reversal, but it is *those who say* that all things are false that 'are turned about', 'incur reversal'. Given what follows in τ34 and what we have learnt about περιτροπή, this should mean that they are forced into admitting that

⁶⁶ Burnyeat himself does not use the labels 'absolute self-refutation' and *Consequentia Mirabilis*, but his description clearly warrants my paraphrase.

⁶⁷ McPherran (1987: 292) agrees with Burnyeat that they are cases of absolute self-refutation.

⁶⁸ καὶ δὴ τοὺς μὲν πάντα λέγοντας ψευδῆ ἐδείξαμεν πρόσθεν περιτρεπομένους. εἰ γὰρ πάντ' ἐστὶ ψευδῆ, ψεύδος ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ πάντ' ἐστὶ ψευδῆ, ἐκ πάντων ὑπάρχον. ψεύδους δὲ ὄντος τοῦ πάντ' ἐστὶ ψευδῆ, τὸ ἀντικείμενον αὐτῷ ἀληθές ἐστὶ, τὸ οὐ πάντ' ἐστὶ ψευδῆ. εἰ ἄρα πάντ' ἐστὶ ψευδῆ, οὐ πάντ' ἐστὶ ψευδῆ.

not all things are false, the contradictory of their thesis. Sextus' phrasing would be devious if all he meant were that those who maintain that all things are false are mistaken because their thesis is demonstrably false, by περιτροπή. One could still defend the plausible idea that such a dialectical manoeuvre is made possible by (and mirrors) a particular logical property of the thesis asserted: those who say that all things are false can be forced into admitting the contradictory of their own thesis because the falsehood of that thesis can be established through a proof along the lines of CM.⁶⁹ Perhaps ancient περιτροπή always wears a dialectical dress, but it would still be, intrinsically, a sober form of absolute self-refutation.

This conciliatory approach has its drawbacks. If we follow carefully the steps of τ34's περιτροπή

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) If all things are false, 'All things are false' is false; | By universal instantiation |
| (2) If 'All things are false' is false, 'Not all things are false' is true; | $Fp \rightarrow T\neg p$ |
| (3) Therefore, if all things are false, not all things are false. | From (1) and (2), by transitivity and $T\neg p \rightarrow \neg p$ |

we notice that the argument halts one inference short of CM: no conclusion is inferred from the conditional (3) of the form $p \rightarrow \neg p$. Should we presume that this happens because the intended conclusion by CM, $\neg p$ ('Therefore, not all things are false'), is only too clear and thus implicitly meant? On the basis of what I have argued about the extremely shadowy status of CM in antiquity, to take such an answer for granted might be hazardous, and we should also be wary of interpreting (3) as a true conditional proposition which might function as the premiss of an instance of CM, given what we have learnt about the favour encountered by 'Aristotle's Thesis'. But, then, the proposal to catalogue this argument under the general heading 'absolute self-refutation' becomes questionable. As for Mackie's own specific reconstruction of the logic of the absolute self-refutation of 'Nothing is true' (chapter 2), that reconstruction clearly does not fit τ34, because the initial move of this περιτροπή is the recognition of the reflexivity of 'All things are false' ('If all things are false, then "All things are false" is false'),⁷⁰ and not Mackie's law of T-prefixability ('If all things are false, then it is true (that) ("All things are false")').

⁶⁹ Analogously, one might say that those who present a certain thesis are reduced to the impossible, i.e. are bound to admit an impossibility, because their thesis entails an impossibility.

⁷⁰ For a similar argument cf. Epict. *Disc.* 2.20.1-3: 'And one might consider as perhaps the greatest proof of something being evident (ἐναργές) the fact that even someone who contradicts it is found to be obliged to use (συγχρησασθαι) it; for example if someone should contradict the proposition that

Given the kind of ellipticity we do find in Sextus, projecting the framework suggested by the first sentence of T34 into the subsequent part of the passage does no violence to the text. On my reading, T34 should be paraphrased as follows: 'Now, as to those who assert that all things are false, we showed that they necessarily end up admitting the contradictory thesis. For if they say that all things are false, they must admit that "All things are false", being one of all things, is itself false. And if they admit this, they cannot help conceding that its contradictory, "Not all things are false", is true. Therefore, if they say that all things are false, they are inexorably forced by reversal into admitting that not all things are false.' Once again, the thesis that 'Everything is false' and the proponents of it would be unmasked as hopeless dialectical losers.

Is such a dialectical tactic unbeatable? As I noticed earlier (chapter 5, section 1), step (2) might encounter opposition in this context: although it rests on a fundamental and apparently uncontroversial principle governing our notions of truth and falsehood ($Fp \rightarrow T\neg p$), it is likely to be rejected by an opponent who suggests that 'Everything is false'. Therefore, such an opponent could protest that that principle should not be exploited against him, question-beggingly, in a self-refutation argument, if this argument is supposed to defeat him by relying only on his thesis and its actual presuppositions and consequences. How successful such a defensive manoeuvre would be is, however, far from obvious, as I have argued in chapter 5.⁷¹

At the beginning of T34, Sextus writes as if the *περιτροπή* argument he is about to present had already been illustrated before ('we have shown

some universal statement is true, it is clear that he must make the opposite assertion "no universal statement is true". Poor creature, this will not be true either. For what else does this amount to than "If a statement is universal, it is false"? (καὶ σχεδὸν τοῦτο μέγιστον ἂν τις ποιήσαιτο τεκμήριον τοῦ ἑναργές τι εἶναι, τὸ ἐπ' ἀνάγκης εὐρίσκεισθαι καὶ τῷ ἀντιλέγοντι συγχρησασθαι αὐτῷ· οἷον εἴ τις ἀντιλέγοι τῷ εἶναι τι καθολικὸν ἀληθές, δηλοῦν ὅτι τὴν ἐναντίαν ἀπόφασιν οὗτος ὀφείλει ποιήσασθαι· οὐδὲν ἐστὶ καθολικὸν ἀληθές, ἀνδράποδον, οὐδὲ τοῦτο. τί γὰρ ἄλλο ἐστὶ τοῦτο ἢ οἷον εἴ τι ἐστὶ καθολικὸν, ψευδὸς ἐστίν;). It is interesting to register Barnes's (1997b: 30–1) prejudice that Epictetus' argument here is based on CM, but is not formulated as rigorously as a modern logician would like. Actually, supposing that there were no true universal statement, by stating 'No universal statement is true' one would be making a Liar-paradoxical statement; to conclude by CM that 'No universal statement is true' must be false (or that there must be some true universal statement) is logically unwarranted. For the following and equally interesting part of Epictetus' passage cf. p. 345n123.

⁷¹ One might elicit the admission that not everything is false directly from the admission that 'Everything is false' is false (by straightforward semantic descent $Fp \rightarrow T\neg p$). I have explained on p. 74 that having to reject a principle like $Fp \rightarrow T\neg p$ would be an embarrassing escape route; by rejecting also $Fp \rightarrow \neg p$ the opponent would upset our commonsense conception of truth and falsehood even more, and would risk making his position completely unintelligible.

above that . . .'). He is probably referring to this passage of the previous book of *Against the Logicians*:⁷²

T35 For if all the appearances are false and nothing is true, 'Nothing is true' is true. If, therefore, nothing is true, something true exists; and in this way Xenocrates was driven round to the opposite of his original proposal (εἰς τὸναντίον τῇ προθέσει περιήχθησαν), when he said (λέγοντες) that all appearances are false and that absolutely nothing true exists in reality. For, in general, it is impossible to say of any particular thing that it is false without also determining that something is true. For example, when we say that A is false, we are predicating the existence of that very falsity of A, and we are affirming that 'A is false', so that what we are asserting is virtually something like this: 'It is true that A is false'. Simultaneously with saying that a thing is false, then, we are also necessarily determining the existence of something true.⁷³ (M 7.399)

In lieu of the usual *περιτροπή* vocabulary, Sextus uses here the phrase εἰς τὸναντίον τῇ προθέσει περιήχθησαν. This is further verification of the meaning of *περιτροπή*: 'to incur reversal' must be equivalent to 'to be driven round to the opposite of one's original proposal', where one's 'original proposal' (πρόθεσις) is what one has said (λέγοντες). Once again, the examination of the immediate context also reveals that this reversal is not presented as something that falsifies Xenocrates' thesis; the argument of T35 shows why 'one must say (λεκτέον) . . . that not all <appearances> are false' (7.398).

But let us inspect our argument more closely. Its pattern differs significantly from that of T34's *περιτροπή*, since it does not rely on self-reference,⁷⁴ and has a form we have never encountered in ancient texts so far (either Sextus' backwards reference in T34 was careless, or he could not appreciate the difference).⁷⁵ Undeniably, Sextus' formulation 'If nothing is true, "Nothing is true" is true; if, therefore, nothing is true, something true exists' bears a striking resemblance to Mackie's proof of the absolute self-refutation of 'Nothing is true' which we discussed in chapter 2:

⁷² So e.g. Bett 2005: 99n18.

⁷³ εἰ γὰρ πᾶσαι αἱ φαντασίαι εἰσὶ ψευδεῖς καὶ οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἀληθές, ἀληθές ἐστὶ τὸ οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἀληθές. εἰ δ' αὖ μὴδὲν ἐστὶν ἀληθές, ἐστὶν ἀληθές· καὶ οὕτως εἰς τὸναντίον τῇ προθέσει περιήχθησαν οἱ περὶ τὸν Ξενοκράτην, λέγοντες πᾶσας τὰς φαντασίας εἶναι ψευδεῖς καὶ μὴδὲν ὅλως ἐν τοῖς οὐσιν ὑπάρχειν ἀληθές. καθόλου γὰρ ἀμήχανόν ἐστι τῶν ἐπὶ μέρους τι λέγοντα ψεῦδος μὴ οὐχὶ καὶ ἀληθές ὀρίζειν. οἷον ὅτε λέγομεν ψεῦδος εἶναι τὸ Α, τοῦ μὲν Α τὸ ψεῦδος αὐτὸ ὑπάρχειν κατηγοροῦμεν, τὸ δὲ ψεῦδος ἐστὶ τὸ Α τίθεμεν, ὥστε δυνάμει τοιοῦτόν τι ἀποφαίνεσθαι ἀληθές ἐστὶ τὸ ψεῦδος εἶναι τὸ Α. ἅμα οὖν τῷ ψεῦδος τι λέγειν καὶ τὸ εἶναι ἀληθές ἐξ ἀνάγκης ὀρίζομεν.

⁷⁴ Pace McPherran 1987: 292. ⁷⁵ As Bett (2005: 99n18) notices.

Mackie		Sextus Empiricus
(1) $(\forall p)(p \rightarrow Tp)$	T-prefixability	
(2) $\neg(\exists p)Tp \rightarrow T(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$	From (1), by substitution	If nothing is true, 'Nothing is true' is true
(3) $T(\neg(\exists p)Tp) \rightarrow (\exists p)Tp$	Existential generalisation	<If 'Nothing is true' is true, something true exists>
(4) $\neg(\exists p)Tp \rightarrow \neg(\neg(\exists p)Tp)$	From (2), (3), by transitivity and double negation	If nothing is true, something true exists
(5) $\neg(\neg(\exists p)Tp)^{76}$	From (4), by CM	

My contention is that this surface resemblance does not survive careful scrutiny. Once again, the final inferential step by CM delivering the conclusion (5) of Mackie's absolute self-refutation does not feature in the lines of Sextus' Greek: the idea that this is fortuitous becomes less and less convincing as long as we continue stumbling across more and more cases in which the same supposed chance omission consistently recurs. Moreover, in Sextus the justification underlying (2) 'If nothing is true, "Nothing is true" is true' is not Mackie's law of T-prefixability, on the use of which in self-refutation contexts I expressed my perplexity in chapter 2, but the different general (καθόλου) principle, according to which 'it is impossible to say (λέγοντα) of any particular thing that is false without also determining that something is true'. Sextus' explanation in the second half of T35 makes it abundantly clear that this is not an abstract 'law' concerning *propositions*, but governs our practice of making *assertions*⁷⁷ and the very nature of this speech act: asserting that *p* is tantamount to asserting '*p* is true', i.e. making an assertion is predicating something (in this case, falsehood) of some subject (in this case, everything) but also, at the same time, positing the whole asserted propositional content as true.⁷⁸ The logic

⁷⁶ I argued in chapter 2 that Mackie's use of the main negation \neg and of T ('(it) is true (that)') are ambiguous. This difficulty can be bracketed for our present purposes.

⁷⁷ Sextus does not use any single technical term for 'to assert' in this passage, switching between λέγειν, τίθεναι and ἀποφαίνεσθαι.

⁷⁸ Burnyeat's claim that 'the principle "There are no truths" entails its contradictory opposite' (1976a: 50; italics mine) should be emended, therefore, into 'the assertion of the principle "There are no truths" entails its contradictory opposite', where the notion of entailment is not that of logical consequence, but resembles the 'pragmatic implication' discussed in the literature listed in the

of T35's reversal now becomes clear: when someone, like Xenias, asserts that 'Nothing is true', he is, by this very assertion, committing himself to the truth of what he is asserting (since 'with saying that a thing is false we are also necessarily determining⁷⁹ the existence of something true'),⁸⁰ but, then, he must grant that at least one truth does exist, which is the contradictory of his original position, thus conceding defeat. This is why one had better not *say* that 'Nothing is true'; nothing is added concerning the truth or falsehood of the propositional content of that assertion.

Sextus' explanation of the logic of this self-refutation argument also casts new light on other passages we have analysed above. For in the case of T35 it is impossible to deny that, whereas Sextus' wording ('If... nothing is true, "Nothing is true" is true. If, therefore, nothing is true, something true exists') could make one easily think of a proof by CM of the truth of the proposition 'Something is true', that formulation is actually meant to be an extremely *elliptical reminder* of the various stages of a περιτροπή which clearly presupposes some dialectic in the background. But the compressed formulation of T35's περιτροπή strongly resembles, in tone and context, those we have found in T23, T32 and T34; therefore, T35 provides us with valuable corroboration of my proposed reading of those texts too. We had started with the impression of having finally discovered a clear ancient instance of absolute self-refutation unequivocally matching Burnyeat's and Mackie's description; we end up with confirmation that ancient περιτροπή, in its nature and purposes, cannot be identified with, or reduced to, that modern form.

In this case the ancient approach is not only different from the modern one, but also less problematic. For, as I have already noted, that nothing is true is, at least on some possible understandings of the fuzzy 'nothing', something which, while not possibly-true, is still possible.⁸¹ In chapter 2

second part of p. 3n6 (some analogy exists between the assertion of 'Nothing is true' and the so-called 'Moorean assertions', such as 'This is a table, but I do not believe that' or 'This is a table, but that is not true'). For the idea that an assertion (even an insincere one) is a commitment to the truth of the proposition asserted cf. e.g. Searle 1979: 12. For a useful overview of the various ways in which the complex relationship between assertion, truth, belief and knowledge can be cashed out cf. Pagin 2008.

⁷⁹ For Sextus' usage of the verb ὀρίζω cf. PH 1.197 (p. 331n76).

⁸⁰ For the idea that someone making an assertion is actually thereby making more than one (by implicitly asserting whatever follows from it) cf. Arist. *Top.* 2.5, 112a17–23. However, Aristotle, unlike Sextus, has in mind the semantic implications of what is asserted, and not the pragmatic implications of the speech act of assertion itself.

⁸¹ For example, if 'nothing' ranged over sentence-tokens and no sentence-token existed. In such a case, the assertion that nothing is true would be Liar-paradoxical (cf. p. 15).

I took issue with Mackie's approach to absolute self-refutation for overlooking this possibility and purporting to establish the necessary existence of some truths, and perhaps even the necessary falsehood of 'Nothing is true'. T35's argument sets itself a more 'modest' task: showing how the commonsense view that some truth exists can be defended in ordinary contexts, because any assertion of its denial will amount, at the same time, to an admission of its truth.⁸² This is not to say that such a task is easily accomplished: a supporter of the thesis that nothing is true could protest that his speech acts are being misinterpreted, and that the normal presuppositions and rules of communication and dialectic do not hold good for them. He could suggest, for example, that his utterances lack assertoric force, but have some different kind of rhetorical or performative function.⁸³ However, the (heavy) burden of providing a consistent and intelligible account of what he is doing when he states that 'Nothing is true', and of why we should be interested in it, falls now upon Xenocrates.

⁸² One might suggest that the point of T35 is that 'Nothing is true' is, in Mackie's own jargon, 'operationally self-refuting', i.e. a proposition that cannot be coherently asserted because what is implied by making an assertion contradicts the asserted content (cf. part II, chapter 13: for a similar analysis of the self-refutation of 'Nothing is true' cf. Passmore 1961: 68). Such a diagnosis in terms of operational self-refutation is in fact strictly related to mine, but not interchangeable with it: on my reconstruction T35 emphasises the actual dialectical consequences which someone like Xenocrates incurs when incoherently asserting that 'Nothing is true' (a self-defeat by reversal), while operational self-refutation establishes more 'impersonally' the impossibility of coherently asserting that 'Nothing is true'. The distinction is analogous to the one between the elenctic proof of PNC and the 'meta-elenctic' argument in *Metaphysics* Γ 4 (cf. section 4.2 of chapter 5).

⁸³ Cf. e.g. Protagoras' case in the 'apology' in the *Theaetetus* (pp. 43–4 and p. 65n104), or the Pyrrhonian use of language and argument which I shall examine in part III, chapter 14.

CHAPTER 7

Augustine's turn

We are approaching the end of our journey through the ancient philosophical tradition in the hunt for early instances of self-refutation arguments deployed against 'Everything is true', 'Nothing is true' and kindred theses. One final witness deserves our attention: in his defence of the existence and imperishability of truth itself, Augustine seems to follow an argumentative pattern different from all those we have encountered so far in the ancient landscape.

7.1 TRUTH IS IMPERISHABLE: A *CONSEQUENTIA MIRABILIS*
IN THE *SOLILOQUIA* (2.2.2)

Let us jump a couple of centuries forward, from Sextus to Augustine's *Soliloquia* (386–7 AD). In spite of its title (*Soliloquies*), this short writing has the form of a dense dialogue between Augustine and a character, Ratio, who presumably represents Augustine's own reason,¹ some kind of inner intellectual voice.² At the beginning of the second book the question is raised whether our souls are immortal and thus will retain (and indeed increase) their knowledge forever. As the first step towards an answer, Ratio argues for the imperishability of truth:

T36 R.: When it [*sc.* the world] will have perished, if it's going to perish, will it not then be true that the world has perished? For as long as it's not true that the world has perished, it hasn't perished. There is a conflict, therefore, between the world having perished and it not being true that the world has perished.

A.: I grant this too.

R.: And what about this: does it seem to you that it's possible that something be true, while truth does not exist?

¹ As Augustine himself suggests, surprisingly without full confidence (1.1.1).

² Probably Ratio is something like the inner Teacher of Augustine's *De magistro* (*On the Teacher*). For Plato's influential idea that thinking is having a sort of silent inner dialogue with oneself cf. p. 358.

- A.: In no way.
 R.: Therefore there will be truth, even if the world perishes.
 A.: I cannot deny that.
 R.: And what about this: if truth itself perishes, will it not be true that truth has perished? (*si ipsa veritas occidat, nonne verum erit veritatem occidisse?*)
 A.: Who would deny that either?
 R.: But there cannot be something true if truth doesn't exist.
 A.: I have granted that a moment ago.
 R.: Therefore in no way will truth perish (*nullo modo igitur occidet veritas*).³
 (Sol. 2.2.2)

The structure of Ratio's argument is transparent:

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------------|
| (1) | If truth (<i>veritas</i>) perishes, after it perishes it will be true (<i>verum</i>) that truth has perished. | |
| (2) | If <at any time> something is true, truth exists <at that time>. | |
| <3> | <Even if truth perishes, truth will exist after it perishes.> | From (1) and (2) |
| (4) | Therefore, in no way will truth perish. | From <3> |

Premiss (1) looks like an instantiation of a 'temporalised' version of Mackie's law of T-prefixability: if a certain predicate applies to something at a certain time, then it will be true at a later time that the predicate applied to that thing ($P_t x \rightarrow T_{t+1}(P_{ed} x)$). In the first half of T36 Ratio had utilised the same law with the hypothesis that 'the world perishes' in order to illustrate its validity: if the world perishes, it will later be true that the world perished. Premiss (2) is secured by the definition of *veritas*: truth is that by which whatever is true (*verum*) is true (2.15.29), and whereas *veritas* persists when

³ R.: Cum interierit, si interiturus est, nonne tunc id erit verum, mundum interisse? Nam quamdiu verum non est mundum occidisse, non occidit. Repugnat igitur, ut mundus occiderit et verum non sit mundum occidisse.

A.: Et hoc concedo.

R.: Quid illud? Videturne tibi verum aliquid esse posse, ut veritas non sit?

A.: Nullo modo.

R.: Erit igitur veritas, etiamsi mundus intereat.

A.: Negare non possum.

R.: Quid? Si ipsa veritas occidat, nonne verum erit veritatem occidisse?

A.: Et istud quis negat?

R.: Verum autem non potest esse, si veritas non sit.

A.: Iam hoc paulo ante concessi.

R.: Nullo modo igitur occidet veritas.

'something *verum* passes away' (1.15.28), nothing could ever be *verum* if *veritas* did not exist.⁴

It is not difficult to see how the imperishability of truth can be derived from these premisses. The unstated intermediate step <3> follows from (1) and (2), and the conclusion that in no way will truth perish is a straightforward consequence of it: if not even on the assumption that it perishes (i.e. ceases to exist) can *veritas* cease to exist, then there is no way *veritas* could perish. Mackie's proof of the necessary falsehood, by absolute self-refutation, of 'Nothing is true' was based on T-prefixability and CM (cf. chapter 2); Augustine's proof of the imperishability of truth, while not making explicit reference to CM, seems to rely on some analogous inferential step (from <3> to (4)), and clearly starts from the application of a version of T-prefixability.⁵ It seems that we have come, finally, as close as we could have hoped to a genuine ancient antecedent for what in Mackie's analysis is an absolute self-refutation argument. Although it is presented by Ratio within her dialogue with Augustine, the argument functions independently of its dialectical context; the vocabulary of assertion, admission, concession, so conspicuous in most of the earlier instances of περιτροπή, is absent from the various steps of Ratio's argument.⁶

Not only is it difficult, in light of the textual details, to interpret Ratio as making the point that if one asserts that *veritas* does not exist (because it has perished) then one is involuntarily and self-refutingly conceding the existence of at least some *verum*, i.e. the content of one's own assertion, and thus the existence of *veritas* itself (for such a point cf. T35 on p. 117);⁷

⁴ For the relation between *veritas* and *verum* cf. 1.15.27–9.

⁵ As I emphasised in chapter 2, an argument exploiting T-prefixability, like Mackie's and Augustine's, does not rely on self-reference; it is therefore incorrect to say, with Charron and Doyle, that 'the contradiction Augustine sees is, presumably, a function of the indirect self-reference of the idea of all truth perishing, including the truth about itself' (1993: 247).

⁶ That language does occur in T36, where Augustine gives his assent to the various steps of the argument proposed by Ratio, but it is not part of the argument itself, as the summary at 2.15.28 (cf. pp. 128–9n15) clearly confirms.

⁷ Contra D'Agostini 2002: 45–6. Augustine employs a similar kind of strategy, instead, in his *De Vera Religione* (On the True Religion):

Aut si non cernis quae dico, et an vera sint dubitas, cerne saltem utrum te de iis dubitare non dubites; et si certum est te esse dubitantem, quaere unde sit certum... omnis qui se dubitantem intellegit, verum intellegit, et de hac re quam intellegit certus est: de vero igitur certus est. Omnis ergo qui utrum sit veritas dubitat, in seipso habet verum unde non dubitet; nec ullum verum nisi veritate verum est. Non itaque oportet eum de veritate dubitare, qui potuit undecumque dubitare.

But if you do not see what I mean, and you doubt whether there are truths, be careful at least not to doubt that you doubt them; and if it is certain that you are in doubt, seek from where it is certain... Everyone who understands that he is in doubt understands something true, and about that thing which he understands he is certain; thus of some truth he is certain. Therefore everyone

by such a strategy she could never hope to prove what Augustine wants to have established, the impossibility that truth *will ever* perish. Ratio is trying to demonstrate a fundamental and timeless truth about reality, not to clarify what we can or cannot coherently assert now.

Is Augustine's innovation a real step forward? Appraisal of this question is far from easy.⁸ To begin with, it is not obvious whether we are fully entitled to speak of 'innovation' here: Augustine himself neither shows any awareness of his being original and reshaping an old, different dialectical manoeuvre, nor reveals any consciousness of applying a generally valid argumentative pattern (notice that he attaches no self-refutation label to Ratio's argument). Second, when scrutinised carefully Augustine's argument betrays dangerous ambiguities, similar to those I detected in Mackie's formulation of the absolute self-refutation of 'Nothing is true' in chapter 2. In T36 Augustine consistently uses *verum* with infinitive clauses: this suggests that *verum* is adopted as a proposition-forming operator, and not as a predicate of sentences, or whatever the truth-bearers are.⁹ But how does this operator work, and what does it mean? The attempt to settle these issues on the basis of Augustine's usage of *verum* in the context delivers disappointing results. At 1.15.28, shortly before T36, *verum* is treated as a predicate expressing a property of objects: a 'true tree' (*vera arbor*) is an existing, real tree, as opposed to a 'false tree' (1.15.29), but this use of *verum* and *falsum* does not seem to be of much help in deciding the sense of *verum* in T36. This comes as no surprise when one extends the search to the whole second book of the *Soliloquia*: a large portion is devoted to a dazzling quest for the meaning of *verum* and *falsum*, which ends with very few clear answers. At 2.4.5 Ratio discards the proposal that 'something is false

who doubts whether truth exists, has in himself something true from which not to doubt; but nothing true is true if not because of truth. Hence one who could doubt at all ought not to have doubts about truth. (39.73)

If one really doubts (within oneself or before someone else) the existence of any *verum*, and thus of *veritas*, one cannot doubt that one is doubting (the point that understanding, and thus presumably not doubting, that one is doubting is one of the necessary conditions for genuine doubt is made at *Trin.* 10.10.14 (T74 on p. 202)). Therefore, everyone who doubts the existence of *veritas* is admittedly certain of some *verum*, that he is doubting the existence of *veritas*. But being certain of some *verum* is inconsistent with doubt about *veritas*. For a critical analysis of this argument cf. Kirwan 1983: 219–20.

⁸ Although I shall take issue with Augustine's argument, I disagree with Abercrombie's dismissive remark that 'we are conscious that this is a verbal engine, of no ontological efficacy' (1938: 63n1).

⁹ This is not to deny that 'it is often difficult to determine the supposition of an expression, that is whether it is intended to be concerned with a real state of affairs, the proposition or concept formed in the mind in thinking of the state, or autonomously, with itself as a linguistic item' (Charron and Doyle 1993: 245).

because it seems to be something other than what it is, and true because it seems to be what it is' on the grounds that 'if the observer to whom the appearance occurs is removed, there would be neither something false nor something true'. A revised definition is then presented, according to which 'the true is that which is as it appears to be to the knower, if he wants to know and can know', but immediately rejected, mainly on the basis that it would make what is unknowable untrue (2.5.7–8). Augustine proposes then a third definition: 'the true is that which is' (2.5.8), from which the classical puzzle emerges that 'there will be nothing false, for whatever is is true'. The focus of the discussion shifts now from true to false: a twofold account of *falsum* is proposed according to which the false is 'what either pretends to be what it is not or strives towards being absolutely and yet is not', like a picture (2.9.16). Throughout this discussion, the subjects of the predicates *verum* and *falsum* have been objects. At 2.11.19–21 disciplines, in particular grammar and dialectic, are called 'true'; since disciplines include 'definitions and divisions and processes of reasoning aimed at determining the essence of each thing', we could welcome at this stage a first implicit recognition that *verum* applies to propositional items. Such recognition becomes explicit only some sections later: Medea's flight on winged snakes, being something entirely non-existent, cannot even be called false, whereas the sentence (*sententia*) describing it can be said to be false, and 'there is a great difference between the things which we say and those about which we say something' (2.15.29). Only towards the end of the *Soliloquia* and well after T36, then, are propositional items like *sententiae* (declarative sentence-tokens) included among the bearers of falsehood and truth: however, no account of *verum* fully relevant to its use in T36 has emerged.

On the basis of what we have just seen, let us examine two possible analyses of premiss (1), which is the kernel of Ratio's argument:

- (1a) If truth perishes, after it perishes <the sentence> 'Truth has perished' will be true.
- (1b) If truth perishes, it will then be the case that truth has perished.

Interpretation (1a) relies on the possibility of taking *verum* as a predicate expressing a property of *sententiae*, although this is not the most natural reading of Augustine's own wording in T36. (1b) is based, instead, on an extension of the ontological notion of truth as real existence, which Augustine seems to apply only to objects, to entities like facts or obtaining states of affairs: in our case, the state of affairs described by the perfect infinitive *veritatem interisse* ('that truth has perished').

On both interpretations Ratio's starting move is open to criticism. On reading (1a), it is not difficult to imagine a scenario which would falsify the conditional: on the assumption that *verum* is a predicate of sentence-tokens, if all *veritas* perished (say, because the whole of mankind and its products are annihilated), there would not be any existing sentence like 'Truth has perished' left, and so, *a fortiori*, no such true sentence.¹⁰

Reading (1b) looks more promising. If *vera* are existing objects and obtaining states of affairs, the complete obliteration of the universe would be required for the antecedent ('Truth perishes') to become true; on such a hypothesis, however, the consequent would still be true, since it would then be the case that the whole universe and truth have perished. Things being so, *veritas ipsa*, which, on this reading, is the principle by which whatever is the case is the case, could never perish.

Despite its apparent smoothness, even this train of reasoning risks derailing. To begin with, the notion of 'tensed states of affairs' ('that truth perished') to which it appeals is inherently problematic and one could even protest that the universal annihilation presupposed by the antecedent of (1b) would not spare time, any reference to time after the hypothetical destruction of *veritas* thus becoming illicit.¹¹

Second, Augustine's argument would rely on the tacit presupposition that the past is immutable and cannot be erased. Without such a presupposition, which, although eminently reasonable and widespread in ancient thought,¹² is not a logical truth, the idea that *veritas* could never be non-existent without having first perished is no longer unassailable. For one could postulate a sudden annihilation of all the *vera*, present and past: thereafter (so to speak), it would not be the case that truth has perished, because the past existence of *veritas* would have been cancelled too, and what has never existed cannot have perished.

One might try to lighten T36's argument of this hidden extra-logical assumption by suggesting that 'Veritas has perished' is not to be taken

¹⁰ Watson (1990: 184) takes reading (1a) for granted, and proposes an analogous criticism. This objection is similar to that which I have formulated in chapter 2 against Mackie's absolute self-refutation argument on reading (b). One might suggest that Augustine would have counter-objected that there would still exist the thoughts in the mind of God as bearers of truth, since God certainly cannot be annihilated together with mankind. This would make the argument clearly question-begging, however, especially in light of the fact that Augustine identifies God with *veritas* itself (cf. p. 130n21).

¹¹ Augustine could have been sympathetic towards this line of reasoning, to judge by his argument for the non-eternity of time in *Confessions* 11 and *De Civitate Dei* 11, according to which it makes no sense to ask what God did *before* creating the world and time (cf. p. 129n17).

¹² Cf. e.g. Arist. *NE* 6.2, 1139b8–11: 'what is past does not admit of not having happened; that is why Agathon is correct to say "Of this alone even a god is deprived, to make what is all done to have not happened"'; Cic. *Fat.* 14: 'all truths in the past are necessary, as Chrysippus held, disagreeing with his teacher Cleanthes, because they are immutable and what is past cannot turn from true to false'.

literally, as a description of a past event, but as equivalent to 'Veritas does not exist' (or, what amounts to the same, 'Nothing is *verum*'). This would make Ratio's reasoning even more similar to Mackie's, by eliminating the significant difference in their use of tenses. I believe this is not, however, a commendable strategy, since Mackie's version of the argument is actually weaker than Augustine's. On the current reading (1b) of T36's main premiss, *verum* is what exists or is the case, as opposed to what does not exist or is not the case. On the hypothesis that *veritas* does not exist and nothing is *verum* reality is, so to speak, a complete blank. To postulate the existence of some kind of second-order *verum*, i.e. the fact that nothing (or, to avoid self-reference, nothing else) is *verum*, empties *verum* and *veritas* of their supposed role and significance. Although nothing precludes this kind of prefixability from a formal point of view, we should examine carefully what it amounts to. Consider the following example. Socrates is long dead, he no longer exists (Augustine would perhaps be ready to say that Socrates is not *verus*); does this mean that there is a state of affairs, obtaining now, of Socrates not being alive? One might reasonably reply that there is no such state of affairs which makes the sentence 'Socrates is alive' false: 'Socrates is alive' is false today because the state of affairs that Socrates is alive does not obtain, and not because some mysterious negative state of affairs (that Socrates is *not* alive) obtains. To attach the adjective *verum* to a negative state of affairs, albeit formally unimpeachable, is to empty it of the meaning and function we are attributing to it here: as a consequence of this move, *veritas* would become a principle both of existence (it is because of *veritas* that it is currently the case that I am alive) and of non-existence (it is because of *veritas* that it is the case that Socrates is not currently alive). Moreover, to crowd one's ontology with a swarm of negative states of affairs obtaining (being *vera*) whenever the corresponding positive ones do not obtain seems to be an unavoidable toll for Augustine's argument on this reading of its main premiss; but in the presence of such an unparsimonious ontology we need not be fanatic Ockhamists to shiver (not to speak of the oddness of describing non-linguistic items like states of affairs as 'negative').¹³ I leave to the reader to work out how Mackie's absolute self-refutation argument faces

¹³ For example, on the basis of *Metaph.* Δ 29, 1024b17–21 Crivelli has convincingly argued that 'the only states of affairs recognised by Aristotle are "affirmative" states of affairs' (2004b: 49–50). This is not to say that an ontology which allows the existence of negative facts (i.e. obtaining negative states of affairs) corresponding to false propositions and making them false is sheer nonsense. Such an ontology was defended, for example, by Russell in his 1918 lectures on logical atomism (cf. Russell 1956: 211, from which my example of the false proposition 'Socrates is alive' is borrowed). For a useful survey of the main philosophical analyses of the controversial notion of state of affairs cf. Wetzel 2008.

in fact analogous objections on some possible readings of the T-prefixability law (cf. chapter 2).

Some little amount of critical reflection has been sufficient to show that, on the more promising interpretation (1b) of its crucial premiss, Augustine's apparently straightforward argument in T36 actually commits us to the immutability of the past, the imperishability of time and the existence of controversial entities like tensed (or negative) states of affairs. Although someone might decide to buy the whole assorted package, it is important to be aware that an argument that appeared to be based on a few uncontroversial pieces of formal logic hides a variety of extra-logical presuppositions to which we are committing ourselves by accepting its soundness.

But on this reconstruction Ratio's reasoning is also questionable for contextual reasons. The ultimate goal of the argument for the imperishability of *veritas* is to establish the immortality of the soul: if *veritas* (e.g. the truth of a discipline like geometry) is imperishable, and truths must necessarily dwell in our souls, then our souls must themselves be immortal (2.19.33). But the necessary existence of that *veritas* which is established by the argument on interpretation (1b), i.e. the necessary existence of at least some *verum* in the purely formal sense just discussed, cannot guarantee the immortality of our souls, since the only *verum* that will exist even in the most apocalyptic scenario is an entity which need not (and cannot) dwell in our souls (the supposedly true fact that everything, including us, has been annihilated).

Augustine was probably aware of at least some of the difficulties of Ratio's strategy which I have denounced.¹⁴ After a summary of T36,¹⁵ his

¹⁴ One could object that a third possible interpretation of (1) has been unduly overlooked so far:

(1c) If truth itself perishes, after it perishes <the proposition> 'Truth has perished' will be true,

where a proposition is neither a sentence-token nor a state of affairs, but the sense of, or what is expressed by, the former, distinct from the latter. It is not clear that such a third way would help here. To begin with, this notion of proposition is itself far from being philosophically uncontentious. Second, no analogous concept appears in Augustine's *Soliloquia* (although one might argue that the true *disciplinae* must be collections of true propositions of this kind, something which Augustine himself does not suggest, however). Third, I do not see definitive reasons for refusing to run the same argument as I have used for sentences in the case of propositions too. If one should say that these abstract entities, unlike sentences, are by their own nature indestructible, one would be refusing to grant hypothetically the antecedent of (1c), i.e. to enter the game of the self-refutation argument altogether. For if propositions are eternal and are the bearers of the predicates *verum* and *falsum*, many (possibly infinitely many) *vera* will exist at any given time, and *veritas* will therefore be eternal, without any need for focusing on the truth-value of the specific proposition 'Truth has perished'.

¹⁵ R.: Ex eo, quantum memini, veritatem non posse interire conclusimus, quod non solum, si totus mundus intereat, sed etiam si ipsa veritas, verum erit et mundum et veritatem interisse. Nihil autem verum sine veritate; nullo modo igitur interit veritas.

plea for more time to assess the merits of the argument and his promise that, although he himself could not find any objection, he would make sure 'that learned and prudent men read these things and correct any rashness of ours there may be' (2.15.28)¹⁶ could be hints at some genuine perplexity or dissatisfaction.¹⁷

Whatever Augustine's actual intentions might have been, his vibrant appeal to 'learned and prudent men' could not lapse unheard: in the middle ages a handful of illustrious readers of the *Soliloquia* eagerly looked back at Ratio's self-refutation argument, either to endorse it or to criticise it. Although this will lead us beyond our self-imposed and familiar boundaries of 'ancient philosophy', let us follow this interesting thread, which will contribute to further clarification of the logic and the limits of Augustine's original argument.

7.2 EXCURSUS: THE MEDIEVAL LEGACY OF AUGUSTINE'S RATIO¹⁸

In the preface to his *Monologium* (1077 AD) Anselm of Canterbury declares full allegiance to the ideas expressed in the writings of Augustine. This argument seems to substantiate Anselm's claim:

A.: Agnosco ista et multum miror, si falsa sunt.

R.: Ergo illud alterum videamus.

A.: Sine me paululum considerare, oro te, ne huc iterum turpiter redeam.

R.: Ergone interisse veritatem verum non erit? Si non erit verum, non ergo interit. Si verum erit, unde post occasum veritatis verum erit, cum iam veritas nulla est?

R.: To the best of my recollection we concluded that truth cannot perish because not only if the whole world perishes, but also if truth itself perishes, it will be true that both the world and truth have perished. But there is nothing true without truth; in no way, therefore, will truth perish.

A.: I acknowledge these things and I would be very surprised if they were false.

R.: Let us then look at that other point.

A.: Give me a little more time to consider this, please, so that I do not have to come back again to this point in confusion.

R.: Then will it not be true that truth has perished? If it will not be true, then it will not perish. And if it will be true, from what will it be true after the collapse of truth, when there is no truth any longer? (*Sol.* 2.15.28)

¹⁶ Nihil habeo, quid plus cogitem atque considerem; perge ad aliud. Certe faciemus, quantum possumus, ut docti atque prudentes viri legant haec et nostram, si qua est, corrigan temeritatem; nam me nec modo nec aliquando arbitror, quid contra hoc dicatur, posse invenire.

¹⁷ Ratio's argument exhibits some structural resemblance to the following argument for the eternity of time: if time was created, there was a time before then in which no time existed; if time will perish, there will be a time after then in which time will not exist; therefore time neither was created nor will perish (cf. e.g. S.E. *M* 10.189). Since Augustine explicitly rejected this line of reasoning (cf. e.g. *Civ. Dei* 11.4–6, 12.16; *Conf.* 11.13.15, 11.30.40), he could have been doubtful about endorsing something analogous concerning truth.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Charron and Doyle 1993 for identification of the passages I shall examine in this section. However, my interpretation often differs from theirs, as I shall signal *ad locum*.

T37 And then, if truth had a beginning, or will have an end, before it began it was true that truth did not exist, and after it will be ended it will be true that truth will not exist. Yet, there can be no true without truth. Therefore, there was truth before there was truth, and there will be truth after truth will be ended, which is most incoherent (*inconvenientissimum*). Whether, then, truth is said to have, or understood not to have, beginning or end, truth cannot be limited by any beginning or end.¹⁹ (*Monol.* 18.33)

Anselm is endorsing, and slightly reshaping, Ratio's argumentative line in T36,²⁰ albeit with different purposes: since Anselm identifies God with Supreme Truth (*summa veritas*), whatever he establishes about *veritas* will also follow about God, who is thereby demonstrated to be eternal.²¹ Unfortunately, Anselm's argument seems to inherit the same puzzling indeterminacy which affected Augustine's effort. Anselm returns to it in his later *De Veritate* (*On Truth*, 1080–5 AD), where he takes care to clarify how we must understand it:

T38 S.:²² Although the truth which is in the existence of things is the effect of the Supreme Truth, it is itself also the cause of the truth which is in thought and of that which is in the statement; and these two truths are not causes of any truth.

T: You make a good point. On the basis of it you can now understand how in my *Monologium* I proved by means of the truth of a sentence that the Supreme Truth has neither beginning nor end. For when I said 'When was it ever not true that something was going to be?' I did not mean that this sentence which asserted that something was going to be was without a beginning or that this truth [*sc.* the truth of this sentence] was God; but only that it is impossible to think of a time in which, had this sentence existed, truth would not have been in it. So that . . . we should understand that that Truth, which is the first cause of the truth of that sentence, was

¹⁹ Denique si veritas habuit principium aut habebit finem: antequam ipsa inciperet, verum erat tunc quia non erat veritas; et postquam finita erit, verum erit tunc quia non erit veritas. Atqui verum non potest esse sine veritate. Erat igitur veritas, antequam esset veritas; et erit veritas, postquam finita erit veritas; quod inconvenientissimum est. Sive igitur dicatur veritas habere, sive intelligatur non habere principium vel finem: nullo claudi potest veritas principio vel fine.

²⁰ Unlike Augustine, Anselm does not rely on the future truth of something past ('it will be true that truth has ended'), but on the future truth of something future ('it will be true that truth will not exist'). The future truth of something past was mentioned, however, in the lines immediately before T37.

²¹ Although Augustine employed his argument in support of the immortality of the soul, and not of the eternity of God, he would certainly not have disapproved of Anselm's adaptation, and could have inspired it. At the beginning of the *Soliloquia* (1.1.3), God the Son is identified with Supreme Truth: 'I invoke You, God-truth, in whom and by whom and through whom are true all the things that are true' (*Te invoco, Deus veritas, in quo et a quo et per quem vera sunt, quae vera sunt omnia*). The identification of God with Truth has, of course, illustrious scriptural grounds: cf. e.g. John's (14.6) *ego sum via, veritas et vita* ('I am the way, the truth and the life').

²² 'S.' stands for 'Student' (*Discipulus*); 'T.' stands for 'Teacher' (*Magister*).

without beginning. Indeed, the truth of the sentence could not always be unless its cause always were. For the sentence which says that something is going to be is not true unless something is, in fact, going to be; and nothing is going to be unless it exists in the Supreme Truth.

We must understand in a similar way the sentence which says that something was in the past. For if it is not intelligible that truth could fail to be in this sentence, should it be expressed, then it is necessary that it is impossible to think of an end of that Truth which is the supreme cause of this [sentence's truth]. For it is true to say that something was in the past, because thus in fact it is; and something was in the past because it is so in the Supreme Truth.

Therefore, if it was never possible not to be true that something was going to be, and never will it be possible not to be true that something has been in the past, then it is impossible that there was a beginning or there will be an end of the Supreme Truth.²³ (*Ver.* 10)

Anselm's precise analysis is extremely valuable for our purposes of clarifying the logic of T37 (and possibly of Augustine's *Soliloquia* argument in T36). Although he is not explicit, it is quite evident that Anselm is trying to dispel as misapprehensions some objections which had been levelled against his *Monologium* argument in T37. Let us limit ourselves to the horn of T38's argument concerning the future imperishability of truth, which is the one parallel to Augustine's own reasoning. Anselm clarifies that when he argued that, if truth ended, it would still be true then that some things were true in the past he was not implying the untenable contention that there would still exist true sentence-tokens (*orationes*) concerning the past, but only that *if* such sentences were stated they could not fail to be true. In other words, Anselm is tackling the possible objection I have presented above to the key

²³ D: Ut cum veritas, quae est in rerum existentia, sit effectum summae veritatis, ipsa quoque causa est veritatis, quae cogitationis est, et eius, quae est in propositione; et istae duae veritates nullius sunt causa veritatis.

M.: Bene consideras. Unde iam intelligere potes, quomodo summam veritatem in meo Monologio probavi non habere principium vel finem per veritatem orationis. Cum enim dixi quando non fuit verum quia futurum erat aliquid, non ita dixi, ac si absque principio ista oratio fuisset, quae assereret futurum esse aliquid, aut ista veritas esset Deus; sed quoniam non potest intelligi quando, si oratio ista esset, veritas illi deesset. Ut per hoc . . . intelligatur illa veritas sine principio fuisse, quae prima causa est huius veritatis. Quippe veritas orationis non semper posset esse, si eius causa non semper esset. Etenim non est vera oratio, quae dicit futurum esse aliquid, nisi reipsa sit aliquid futurum; neque aliquid est futurum, si non est in summa veritate.

Similiter de illa intelligendum est oratione, quae dicit quia praeteritum est aliquid. Nam si nullo intellectu veritas orationi huic, si facta fuerit, deesse poterit, necesse est, ut eius veritatis, quae summa causa est istius, nullus finis intelligi possit. Idcirco namque vere dicitur praeteritum esse aliquid, quia ita est in re; et ideo est aliquid praeteritum, quia sic est in summa veritate.

Quapropter si numquam potuit non esse verum futurum esse aliquid, et numquam poterit non esse verum praeteritum esse aliquid: impossibile est principium summae veritatis fuisse aut finem futurum esse.

premiss of Ratio's argument on reading (1a). Anselm, however, does not pursue his goal by completely rejecting the idea that *verum* is an attribute of *orationes* (he writes, on the contrary, that in his *Monologium* he proved the eternity of God *per veritatem orationis*); he extends the use of *verum* to what at any given time would make a certain *oratio* true if it were made²⁴ (in this case, to past obtaining states of affairs), i.e. to that *veritas* which is 'in the existence of things' (something analogous, but not identical, to my reading (1b) of Ratio's main premiss in T36).

Given its different aim, Anselm's version of the argument is immune from some of the problems afflicting Augustine's: the kind of eternal ontological *veritas* which this argument is meant to establish, while irrelevant to the purpose of guaranteeing the imperishability of human souls, could be sufficient to confirm the eternal existence of a supreme principle and cause of it, that *summa veritas* which is identified with God. However, Anselm's argument, as formulated in the *De Veritate*, remains open to some of the perplexities concerning the status of the past which I have expressed above in connection with Ratio's argument in the *Soliloquia*.²⁵

The legacy of Augustine's reflections in the *Soliloquia* emerges again a couple of centuries later in the writings of Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217–1274 AD). In his *De Mystero Trinitatis* (*On the Mystery of the Trinity*), when dealing with the question of 'Whether the existence of God is true beyond doubt' (*Utrum Deum esse sit verum indubitabile*), he proposes the following argument in support of an affirmative answer:

T39 Whatever can be thought, can be asserted; but in no way can it be asserted (*enuntiare*) that God does not exist without it being asserted with this that God does exist. And this is clear as follows: if there is no truth, it is true that there is no truth; and if this is true, then something is true, and if something is true, the First Truth does exist. Therefore, if it cannot be asserted that God does not exist, neither can it be thought.²⁶ (*Myst. Trin.* q. 1, a. 1, n. 26 *quod sic*)²⁷

²⁴ Namely, to its 'truth-maker', to adopt modern jargon. For a survey of the medieval conceptions on the bearers of truth and falsehood cf. Nuchelmans 1982.

²⁵ Although Anselm himself fails to stress the difference between his formulation of the argument in the *Monologium* (T37) and that of the argument he defends in the *De Veritate* (T38), the *Monologium* version, being parallel, in its use of tenses (cf. n. 20 above), to Mackie's self-refutation argument and to the possible interpretation of Ratio's argument discussed on p. 126, is liable to more numerous objections.

²⁶ Quidquid contingit cogitare contingit enuntiare; sed ullo modo contingit enuntiare, Deum non esse, quin cum hoc enuntietur, Deum esse. Et hoc patet sic: quia, si nulla veritas est, verum est, nullam veritatem esse; et si hoc est verum, aliquid est verum, et si aliquid est verum, primum verum est: ergo si non potest enuntiarī, Deum non esse, nec cogitari.

²⁷ For an analogous argument cf. *Myst. Trin.* q. 5, a. 1, n. 5.

Bonaventure believes, and openly acknowledges, that he is following 'Augustine's reasoning' (*rationem Augustini*) here;²⁸ Charron and Doyle subscribe to this view and interpret T39 as a self-refutation argument concluding the necessary existence of truth. There are however important differences between Bonaventure's and Augustine's argument which should not be overlooked. First of all, the conclusion of the necessary existence of *veritas* serves very different purposes in Augustine and Bonaventure (respectively, the demonstration of the immortality of soul and of the existence of God),²⁹ something which of course neither Bonaventure nor his commentators could have failed to notice, but which they surprisingly fail to emphasise. Second, there is a substantial difference in the use of tenses between Augustine ('If truth *will* perish, it *will* be true that truth *has* perished') and Bonaventure ('If there *is* no truth, it *is* true that there *is* no truth').³⁰ Third, and most important, Bonaventure's argument is not meant to prove the eternal existence of Truth/God, but the impossibility of *asserting* (and thus the impossibility of thinking) that Truth/God does not exist 'without it being *asserted* [and thought] with this that God does exist' (notice, again, that the argument belongs to the *quaestio* of whether the existence of God is *indubitabile*, and not of whether God exists). While Augustine had tried to establish some necessary truth about reality, Bonaventure aims at proving something about what we can and cannot coherently say (and think) about reality, and declares this aim explicitly.³¹ We are in the presence of that fundamental difference between, respectively, the modern and ancient understanding of the purposes and prospects of the self-refutation argument which I have discovered, investigated and emphasised throughout this part of the book. But while Charron and Doyle take for granted that Bonaventure is faithfully following Augustine's path because they fail to appreciate the difference between these strategies, I suggest that Bonaventure himself thought he was loyal to Augustine's legacy because he misinterpreted it.³²

²⁸ Cf. T40 below. Since he is referring to the *Soliloquia*, *Augustini ratio* is also, of course, Augustine's *Reason* itself (Ratio).

²⁹ From this point of view, Bonaventure's version resembles Anselm's.

³⁰ From this (but only this) point of view, Bonaventure's version resembles Mackie's formulation of the absolute self-refutation of 'Nothing is true' (chapter 2).

³¹ Bonaventure's inference from the unassertibility of God's non-existence to its unthinkability, on the grounds that 'whatever can be thought can be asserted', is a nice Platonic reminiscence: if thinking is a silent dialogue with yourself (cf. T139 on p. 358), to be able to think something, let alone to accept it as true, you must be able to coherently assert it within yourself in the first place.

³² One might object that although at the beginning of T39 Bonaventure proposes to show that one cannot assert that God does not exist without thereby committing oneself to the admission that God exists, and at the very end avows success in relation to this particular task, in the central part

The following passage can conclusively settle the question of the real nature of T39's argument:

T40 Concerning that which is objected against Augustine's reasoning, that a contradictory does not entail its own contradictory, it must be said that this is true insofar as it is a contradictory. But it must be understood that an affirmative statement (*propositio*) makes a twofold affirmation: one, by which it asserts a predicate of a subject, and another, by which it asserts itself to be true. With respect to the first it is distinguished from a negative statement, which removes a predicate from a subject; but with respect to the second it is the same as that one [*sc.* negative statement], for both negative and affirmative statements assert themselves to be true. With respect to the first, but not to the second, there is a contradiction. But when it is said 'There is no truth', this statement, insofar as it denies a predicate of a subject, does not entail its opposite, i.e. 'Some truth exists'. However, insofar as it asserts that it itself is true, it does entail that some truth exists... Therefore, both parts can be inferred from it [*sc.* from the statement 'There is no truth'], and it is false in itself and unintelligible by any intellect that understands correctly. And this is what Augustine means to say.³³ (*Myst. Trin.* q. 1, a. 1, ad n. 5 *e contrario*)

Bonaventure is defending Augustine's *ratio* (or, more precisely, his own argument in T39, which he believes to be the same as Ratio's argument in the *Soliloquia*) from the charge that a *propositio*, like 'There is no truth', can never entail its own contradictory.³⁴ It is not superfluous to underline the interesting point that this charge takes for granted the validity of 'Aristotle's Thesis' ($\neg(p \rightarrow \neg p)$), attesting to its survival in the medieval age. Bonaventure's reply clarifies the real nature of his argument: whenever making a statement (*propositio*), one is combining (affirmative statement)

of the passage he appears to aim at proving the existence of *veritas* (and thus God, *primum verum*) with a purely formal Mackie-style argument. The impossibility of asserting the non-existence of God might be seen, thus, as an obvious consequence of the fact that this non-existence can be barred as logically impossible by the absolute self-refutation argument sketched in the middle of T39. However, Bonaventure's phrasing would be diabolically misleading if the necessity of asserting the existence of God were a consequence of the demonstrable logical necessity of his existence, rather than of the assertion itself that he does not exist. Notice the striking similarity with the point I made about Sextus Empiricus' T34 in chapter 6, section 2.

³³ Ad illud quod obiicitur contra rationem Augustini, quod contradictoria non infert sua contradictoria: dicendum, quod verum est secundum quod est contradictoria, sed intelligendum est, quod propositio affirmativa duplicem habet affirmationem: unam, qua asserit praedicatum de subiecto, aliam, qua asserit, se esse veram. In prima distinguitur a propositione negativa, quae removet praedicatum a subiecto; in secunda vero communicat cum illa, quia tam propositio negativa quam affirmativa asserit, se esse veram. Quantum ad primam attenditur contradictio, non quantum ad secundam. Cum vero dicitur: nulla veritas est, haec propositio, in quantum negat praedicatum a subiecto, non infert suam oppositam, quae est, aliquam veritatem esse. In quantum autem asserit, se esse veram, infert aliquam veritatem esse... Ideo utraque ex illa potest inferri, et ipsum in se esse falsum et inintelligibile ab intellectu recte apprehendente. Et hoc est quod vult dicere Augustinus.

³⁴ For the full statement of this charge see *Myst. Trin.* q. 1, a. 1, n. 5 *e contrario*.

or disjoining (negative statement) a predicate and a subject, but at the same time one is also declaring that what one is stating, the compound, is true. Thus the statement 'Truth does not exist' denies existence to truth but at the same time also asserts the truth of this very denial; in other words, to state that 'Truth does not exist' amounts to the same as stating 'Existence is not predicated of truth, and this is true'.³⁵ We can now understand why 'in no way can it be asserted that God [*sc.* Truth] does not exist without it being asserted with this that God [*sc.* Truth] does exist' (T39). In T40 Bonaventure clarifies the philosophical grammar of the speech act of declarative statement or assertion (*propositio*): when you understand it, you realise that to assert that God does not exist is to commit yourself, unwittingly, to the contradictory of what you are asserting (and thus to a contradiction).³⁶ The similarity of Bonaventure's argument (both its elliptical formulation in the middle of T39 and its full explanation in T40) with Sextus Empiricus' T35 (cf. chapter 6, section 2) is striking. But it is precisely because of this resemblance that Bonaventure's final exegetical remark in T40 cannot be correct: this is *not* what Augustine meant in his *Soliloquia* (besides the other reasons already explained, trying to prove the immortality of the soul by presupposing that after the hypothesised annihilation of reality and truth there would still be people around truly asserting that truth has perished would be a hopeless strategy).³⁷

My contention that Bonaventure, without realising it, is employing a non-Augustinian and more 'ancient' strategy could find further corroboration in his later *Collationes in Hexaemeron* (*Collations in the Hexameron*),³⁸ in which an argument is presented to the effect that if someone *says* that there is no truth, he is in fact contradicting himself, presumably because he is virtually saying that it is true that there is no truth, so that it is impossible to think or express coherently that truth does not exist:

T41 [Truth, the light of the soul] illuminates so strongly the soul from above that it is not even possible to think or express that it does not exist, without contradicting oneself: because, if truth does not exist, it is true that truth does

³⁵ According to Charron and Doyle, Bonaventure is saying that 'any proposition also implies the assertion of itself' (1993: 250). This formulation is misleading (starting from the translation of *propositio* as 'proposition'): Bonaventure is expressing the very different idea that any statement implies (i.e. commits one to) the further assertion of its own truth (cf. p. 118n78).

³⁶ To employ a familiar distinction, the argument establishes that the assertion that 'Truth (God) does not exist' is not possibly-true (cf. p. 21); once again, this does not imply that it is impossible that Truth (God) does not exist.

³⁷ Consider also the striking difference between Bonaventure's and Anselm's defences of Augustine's argument.

³⁸ *Pace* Charron and Doyle 1993: 251–2.

not exist; therefore something is true; and if something is true, it is true that truth exists; therefore if truth does not exist, truth exists.³⁹ (*Coll.* 4.1)

The same strategy seems to be endorsed and adopted in the same period by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* (1267–73 AD):

- T42 Furthermore, that truth exists is self-evident, because whoever denies (*negat*) that truth exists is conceding (*concedit*) that truth does exist; for if truth does not exist, it is true that truth does not exist. But if there is something true, it is necessary that truth exists. But God is truth itself.⁴⁰ (*Sum. Theol.* p. 1, q. 2, a. 1, n. 3)

³⁹ Ita enim fortiter irradiat super animam, ut etiam non possit cogitari non esse nec exprimi, quin homo sibi contradicat: quia, si veritas non est, verum est, veritatem non esse: ergo aliquid est verum; et si aliquid est verum, verum est, veritatem esse: ergo si veritas non est, veritas est.

About one year before writing his *De Mysterio Trinitatis*, Bonaventure had referred to Augustine's *Soliloquia* argument in his *Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum* (*Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentences*). He had presented the argument exactly as he would do in the central part of T39 (*si nulla veritas est, verum est nullam veritatem esse; et si hoc est verum, aliquid est verum, et si aliquid est verum, aliqua veritas est*), but then he had criticised it as follows:

Propositio autem negativa non infert ipsam nisi sophistice, ut dicunt. Unde ex hoc quod est nihil esse, vel nullam veritatem esse, non contingit concludere nec inferre, veritatem esse. Haec enim propositio: nihil esse, destruit omnem veritatem. Et ideo ad ipsam non sequitur aliqua affirmatio, et haec est falsa: si nihil est, nihil esse est verum. Et si dicatur, quod omnis propositio infert dictum, verum est, sed si nihil est, nulla propositio est nec aliquid. Augustinus autem tale argumentum non facit approbando, sed inquirendo. (*in Sent.* 1, d. 8, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2, ad n. 7)

But a negative *propositio* does not entail it [*sc.* the Truth which is the cause of every true] except in a sophistic manner, as they say. Hence from this, i.e. that nothing exists or that there is no truth, it is impossible to conclude or infer that truth exists. For this *propositio*, that nothing exists, destroys all truth. Therefore from it no affirmation follows, and this is false: 'If nothing exists, it is true that nothing exists'. And if it be said that every *propositio* entails what is said, this is true, but if nothing exists no *propositio* exists, nor anything else. Augustine, however, does not make such an argument with approval, but by way of inquiry.

Bonaventure's analysis is not easy to interpret. If one assumes that the term *propositio* is used here as it will be used in the *De Mysterio Trinitatis* (T40), the central lines seem to flatly contradict what Bonaventure will maintain only one year later (notice, however, that when presenting Augustine's argument in the *Commentaria* Bonaventure had used *sermo* instead of *propositio*). Yet, I suggest there is some room for a more charitable interpretation which does not ask us to believe, as Charron and Doyle (1993: 249) do, that Bonaventure changed his mind so suddenly. The remark that, if nothing existed, there would be no *propositio* at all seems to be directed against any attempt to rely on considerations about the philosophical grammar of statements to prove the impossibility of the annihilation of reality and truth, and has some analogy with the perplexity I have expressed in section 7.1 about the viability of an argument based on reading (1a) of the key premiss of Ratio's argument in the *Soliloquia*. In other words, the passage of the *Commentaria* might express the point that considerations about *propositiones* are irrelevant when aimed at proving the impossibility that truth does not exist (or could cease to exist in the future), rather than the impossibility of coherently asserting and thinking that truth does not exist. Bonaventure would thus be giving two different evaluations of the same argument (his own incorrect interpretation of Augustine's own argument in T36) because of the two different contexts and purposes of that argument which he is considering in the *Commentaria* and in the *De Mysterio Trinitatis*.

⁴⁰ Praeterea, veritatem esse est per se notum, quia qui negat veritatem esse, concedit veritatem esse: si enim veritas non est, verum est veritatem non esse. Si autem est aliquid verum, oportet quod veritas sit. Deus autem est ipsa veritas.

Although this passage is too short to guarantee a definite interpretation of Thomas's intent, the use of the dialectical language of denial and concession warrants a reading along the same lines as I have proposed for Bonaventure's more extensive treatment.⁴¹ It is also worth stressing that the argument occurs within the *quaestio* 'Is the existence of God self-evident?' (*Utrum Deum esse sit per se notum*), and not, significantly, within one of the following two *quaestiones* 'Can the existence of God be proved?' (*Utrum Deum esse sit demonstrabile*) and 'Does God exist?' (*Utrum Deum sit*).

John Duns Scotus is the last protagonist of our brief excursion into the medieval legacy of the *Soliloquia* argument. In his *Ordinatio*, at which he worked until his death in 1307, Scotus lucidly argues against a proof of the necessary existence of *veritas* built on T-prefixability:⁴²

- T43 And when it is proved 'If there is no truth, it is true that there is no truth', this consequence is invalid, because truth can be taken either as the foundation of truth in reality or as truth in the intellectual act of combining and dividing; but if there is no truth, it is not even true that there is no truth, neither in virtue of the truth of things, because no thing exists, nor in virtue of the truth in the intellect which combines and divides, because there is no such intellect. Instead the correct consequence is 'If there is no truth, then it is not true that there is some truth', but it does not follow in addition 'Then, it is true that there is no truth'.⁴³ (*Ordin.* 1, d. 2, p. 1, q. 2, n. 45)

Unlike Bonaventure (and, most probably, Thomas), Scotus is not examining the logic of the *propositio* speech act and its consequences for the coherent assertibility of 'There is no truth'. He is challenging the validity of the move of applying T-prefixability, intended as Augustine and Mackie use it, to the hypothesis that no truth exists. To do so he seems to bring into play considerations very similar to those I have illustrated when criticising Augustine's and Mackie's versions of the argument. Scotus' idea that if nothing existed and nothing were true, then there would be no intellect which could truly judge this (and thus no bearer of what Scotus calls 'formal truth') matches my criticism of the soundness of Ratio's argument in T36 on the assumption (1a) that *verum* is a predicate of sentence-tokens.

⁴¹ Unlike Anselm and Bonaventure, Thomas does not attribute the paternity of the argument to Augustine and elsewhere he rejects the idea that establishing the necessary existence of *veritas* is sufficient to prove the necessary existence of a *first* truth, i.e. God (cf. *Ver.* q. 10, a. 12, ad 3).

⁴² Like Thomas, Scotus also rejects, immediately before T43, the step inferring the existence of that first Truth that is God from the existence of truth in general (*veritas in communi*).

⁴³ Et cum probatur 'si nulla veritas est, nullam veritatem esse verum est', consequentia non valet, quia veritas aut accipitur pro fundamento veritatis in re, aut pro veritate in actu intellectus componente et dividente; sed si nulla veritas est, nec verum est nullam veritatem esse, nec veritate rei, quia nulla res est, nec veritate in intellectu componente et dividente, quia nullus est. Bene tamen sequitur 'si nulla veritas est, ergo non est verum aliquid veritatem esse', sed non sequitur ultra 'ergo verum est aliquid veritatem non esse'.

The remark that if nothing existed then *veritas in re* (identified with existence and 'founding' reality)⁴⁴ would not exist either seems to be based on a tacit refusal to attribute any positive ontological status, deserving the label *verum*, to wholly negative states of affairs like the state of affairs that nothing exists, namely the very same refusal which I have advocated in section 7.1 above.⁴⁵

Curiously enough, Scotus rejected, and with compelling reasons, what was essentially the key move of Augustine's strategy in the *Soliloquia* without even naming Augustine; before him, Bonaventure had thought and declared himself to be championing and endorsing Augustine's *ratio* while actually adopting a very different self-refutation strategy with more ancient roots.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ This truth *in re* is the 'foundation' and cause of the formal truth of sentences. We have already found the same distinction between fundamental and formal truth, formulated in slightly different terms, at the beginning of Anselm's T38 on p. 130.

⁴⁵ As Charron and Doyle underline (1993: 258), Cajetan's criticism of Scotus' objection in his commentary on Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* will be based on his acceptance of fundamental negative truths (we would say 'negative facts') and the related distinction between *veritas fundamentaliter* and *entitas*.

⁴⁶ For a Scotian passage very similar to T43 cf. *Lectura* 1, d. 2, p. 1, q. 2, n. 36. Surprisingly, however, in this passage Scotus' criticism follows an exposition of the argument which looks more similar to Bonaventure's than to Augustine's (1, d. 2, p. 1, q. 2, n. 10).

CHAPTER 8

Interim conclusions

We have reached the end of our exploration of the logic and ancient history of the self-refutation charge against 'Everything is true', 'Nothing is true' and cognate theses.¹ We have started with Mackie's influential treatment of absolute self-refutation; I have expressed reservations both on its intrinsic logical merits and on its suitability as an account of what we can intuitively recognise as self-refutation (chapter 2). We have then jumped twenty-four centuries back to the very beginning of our story. Close inspection of a number of ancient texts has revealed that, contrary to what might appear at first sight, and has been often maintained or tacitly assumed by commentators, a Mackie-style formal proof based on the law of T-prefixability and *Consequentia Mirabilis* finds no clear parallel in the ancient arguments examined (chapters 3–6), with the sole remarkable late exception of Augustine's *Soliloquia* (chapter 7).

I have argued that this conspicuous absence is not the contingent result of a defect of logical talent which prevented the ancients from achieving full consciousness of the logical form of their self-refutation arguments. The ancient approach to self-refutation, which only from the Hellenistic age came to be widely identified by the label περιτροπή, but has been revealed to be quite unitary in its basic features, is not a muddled ancestor of the modern one, but differs from it in substantial and interesting ways. Not only was self-refutation as a formal proof of the necessary falsehood of certain propositions never adopted before Augustine as a matter of fact; I have argued that it *could not* have been adopted by anyone accepting certain 'non-classical' features which seem to be entrenched in the two most prominent ancient logical systems, the Aristotelian and the Chrysippean (chapter 6, section 1).

The ancient self-refutation arguments we have analysed in chapters 3–6 did not aim at establishing, *in vacuo*, the truth-value of propositions like

¹ For a general overview of the same subject in medieval and modern times cf. D'Agostini 2002.

'Everything is true' or 'Nothing is true' on the basis of certain laws (such as *Consequentia Mirabilis*) of our 'classical logic' (which we should not assume to be the logic of the ancients). Those arguments served the different purpose of unmasking certain theses as 'dialectical losers' and silencing their supporters: whoever dares to propose and defend one of these unorthodox theses thereby commits himself, unwittingly, to its contradictory. The self-refutation manoeuvre shows that it is possible to force such adversaries into rejecting their own original proposals and conceding defeat as a direct consequence of advancing or defending them (or so the argument goes: I have argued that in some cases non-trivial rejoinders were available to the victims of self-refutation). In other words, the self-refutation charge, at least in so far as it was levelled at the 'extremist' theses which have been the subject-matter of our inquiry so far, did not aim at establishing, 'in point of logic', some absolute truth about the world, but at clarifying what can and cannot be successfully entertained by us, especially in the context of the dialectical exchange with an opponent, the original *locus* of philosophical inquiry. The *dialectical context* (in the broad sense I have tried to clarify on p. 27 and throughout), thus, is not simply the general framework in which most ancient self-refutation arguments happened to be formulated; it is not, *pace* Barnes (cf. p. 31), an extrinsic and unnecessary clothing which only risks obscuring and muddling the real logical force of those arguments; it is, typically, a *necessary* condition for them to work (an *intrinsic* feature of those arguments, their skeleton, and not their old-fashioned garb).

I have also suggested that, precisely because they are somewhat less 'ambitious', ancient self-refutation arguments steer clear of some of the logical difficulties in which the corresponding formal proofs get entangled (although they still face different dialectical risks, like begging the question against their targets). It is certain formalisations of the ancient arguments which, by cheerfully stripping them of their dialectical elements, are not only philologically inaccurate and historically anachronistic, but also logically suspect: I have tried to illustrate how many of those ancient arguments undergo ruinous 'logical and philosophical losses' if we reduce them to the logical form of CM, and that in fact on some occasions we need to do exactly the opposite, 'redressing' them whenever their dialectical nature is only hinted at by their broad context or by some minute textual details.

Barnes (2007: vii) gives up (or pretends to give up) the fight too easily when he concedes to those contemporary logicians who have little interest in the ancient history of their subject that 'their supposition is quite

true', since 'no logician has anything to learn from a study of Aristotle' (and, *a fortiori*, I suppose, any other ancient philosopher). I believe that Burnyeat's opposite suggestion that careful study of the history of an argument can 'reveal aspects, often unexpected ones, of the argument's philosophical interest and significance' (cf. p. 1) has been fully vindicated by our findings.

PART II

*Pragmatic, ad hominem and
operational self-refutation*

But what we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either.

Frank Ramsey (1990: 146)

Epicurus against the determinist: blame and reversal

In part II I shall focus on a quite heterogeneous group of ancient self-refutation arguments which have been classified by commentators (or appear to be liable to be classified) as early instances of what, following Mackie's taxonomy, are commonly dubbed 'pragmatic' and 'operational' self-refutation. I shall try to show that, in this case too, an overly relaxed projection of modern logical categories on to the ancient arguments could sometimes prevent us from appreciating the precise logic, function and force of these arguments. Let us start then with an alleged early example of pragmatic self-refutation argument.

...

If one ranked philosophical positions on the basis of the frequency with which in the history of philosophy they have come under hostile fire as self-refuting or self-defeating, determinism would occupy a very high spot, probably second only to scepticism and relativism. However, just as different (and often incompatible) brands of scepticism and relativism abound on the market, so there are many varieties of determinism. Some of these seem to be more liable to the self-refutation charge, others less; the specific shape of the charge itself significantly varies, of course, with the variation of the specific theory in the dock. It comes as no surprise, then, that the self-refutation charge was first levelled against determinism as early as the beginning of the Hellenistic age and that its precise target and logic are open to widely discordant interpretations. The condition in which the text introducing that argument is preserved does not make our task easier: it is part of a relatively large but fragmentary section of Epicurus' lost major work, *On Nature* (end of fourth-beginning of third century BC), reconstructed on the basis of three carbonised papyri unearthed at Herculaneum in the eighteenth century and now conjecturally attributed by Laursen to the twenty-fifth book.¹ In the section with which

¹ I will use Sedley's edition of the text printed in Long and Sedley 1987: vol. II, 20C. For a more recent edition cf. Laursen 1997.

we will be concerned Epicurus digresses from the book's ostensible topic, human psychological development, to address and refute the views of an unnamed opponent, often loosely identified in the secondary literature as 'the determinist'.

Let us begin by uncovering what his 'determinism' amounts to.² Epicurus is defending his view that at birth all of us have a wide range of alternative potentials ('seeds') for character development, and the precise way we do in fact develop depends on us (is παρ' ἡμᾶς, 'up to us' or 'due to us' (20C2)).³ A lacuna interrupts the line of the argument, but in light of what follows we can conjecture that it voiced Epicurus' opponent's reply, with the challenge that the direction of our development, and thus ultimately who we are and what we do at any given time, are not in our power, but are causally predetermined by at least two factors which escape our control, our 'congenital make-up' (ἐν τῇ ἐξ ἀρχῆς συστάσει), necessitating our internal structure, and the 'accidental necessity' (ἐν τῇ κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον ἀνάγκη) of our interrelation with the world around us. Epicurus replies that this challenge is incompatible with the undeniable fact that ordinarily 'we rebuke (νουθετεῖν), oppose (μάχεσθαι) and reform (μεταρρυθμίζειν) each other as if the responsibility lay also in ourselves' and not only in hereditary and environmental factors (20C2). Why so? As Sedley (1983a: 24) comments, 'it is an implicit premiss of this that we would not blame⁴ others for any characteristic already ineradicably built into their congenital make-up', or, more generally, for which they were not causally responsible agents. That we are answerable only for those things which are παρ' ἡμᾶς,

² This is an extremely difficult task, to which I will not be able to devote here the space it would require. There is a staggering variety of interpretations of what Epicurus' opponent's 'determinism' and Epicurus' own 'anti-determinism' really amount to (e.g. fatalism, necessitarianism, reductionism, eliminativism as regards the former; libertarianism, anti-reductionism, anti-eliminativism, emergentism as regards the latter). On this issue cf. at least Sedley 1983a, Annas 1992: 123–99, Bobzien 2000, O'Keefe 2002, Wendlandt and Baltzly 2004, Masi 2006.

³ On the causal nuance of παρ' ἡμᾶς here and elsewhere in Epicurus cf. Sedley 1983a: 16 ('παρὰ carries something not unlike the causal sense, "due to", found frequently in the *Letter to Pythocles*, so that the class of things picked out as παρ' ἡμᾶς is whatever results from our own individual agency, that for which we are responsible, that which depends on us') and Bobzien 2000: 293–8. Bobzien emphasises that 'in Epicurus, and quite generally in Hellenistic philosophy in the context of determinism and moral responsibility, the phrase παρ' ἡμᾶς was generally understood as one-sided and causative', usually with a verb of happening or becoming (rather than being) understood: 'something happens or comes to be παρ' ἡμᾶς (because of us)'. On her reading, the phrase was used within a debate about necessitation and agent autonomy. Bobzien contrasts her reading with a different 'two-sided potestative' understanding of the phrase ('it is παρ' ἡμᾶς (up to us) whether or not...'), which would bring to the table the different and (according to her, later) concepts of free choice and freedom to do otherwise.

⁴ It is in particular νουθετεῖν ('rebuke', 'reproach') that carries the evaluative nuance of blame. That blame, and not morally neutral disagreement, is on the table here will become even clearer in the remainder of Epicurus' argument.

and not forced upon us by necessity or chance, is clearly stated by Epicurus in his *Letter to Menoeceus*:

- T44 Whom do you consider superior to the man who... would deride the fate which is introduced by some as master of everything, but see that some things are by necessity, others by chance, and others depend on us, since necessity (ἀνάγκη) is accountable to no one, and chance (τύχη) is an unstable thing to watch, while that which depends on us (τὸ παρ' ἡμᾶς), to which blame (τὸ μεμπτόν) and its opposite are naturally connected, has no master?⁵ (*Men.* 133)

The concept of moral responsibility, embodied in our everyday practice of praising and blaming, makes sense only in the presence of causal responsibility: if something is not 'due to us', if it is not the result of our own agency (broadly intended), we cannot be reasonably praised or blamed for it (or, we could add, rewarded or punished). Our everyday behaviour, then, manifests our belief in the existence of human moral responsibility and thus, in turn, in the existence of human causal responsibility. But, one could ask, what if our ordinary practices are basically misguided, and our universally shared 'preconceptions' (προλήψεις) of human agency and responsibility arising from them delusive?

Instead of dealing with such a possible retort,⁶ Epicurus continues as follows:

- T45 For if someone were to attribute to this very rebuking and being rebuked (τῷ νουθετεῖν καὶ τῷ νουθετεῖσθαι) the accidental necessity (τὴν κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον ἀνάγκη) of whatever happens to be present to oneself at any given time, I'm afraid he can never in this way understand <...>⁷ blaming (μεμψόμενος) or praising (ἐπαινῶν). But if he were to act in this way he would be leaving intact the very same practice which as far as our own selves are concerned creates the preconception of responsibility (τὴν τῆς αἰτίας πρόληψιν).⁸ (20C3–4)

⁵ τίνα νομίζεις εἶναι κρείττονα τοῦ... τὴν δὲ ὑπὸ τινῶν δεσπότιν εἰσαγομένην πάντων ἂν γελῶντος <εἰμάρμενιν, ἀλλ' ἃ μὲν κατ' ἀνάγκην ὄντα συνορῶντος> ἃ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης, ἃ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς, διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν ἀνάγκην ἀνυπεύθυνον εἶναι, τὴν δὲ τύχην ἄστατον ὄραν, τὸ δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς ἀδέσποτον, ὃ καὶ τὸ μεμπτόν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον παρακολουθεῖν πέφυκεν; I adopt and translate the text printed in Long and Sedley 1987: vol. II, 20A.

⁶ On προλήψεις and their use as self-evident canons of truth in Epicurean epistemology cf. e.g. Long and Sedley 1987: sect. 17, Asmis 1984: 19–80, 1999: 276–83.

⁷ Long and Sedley (1987: 103) conjecture that this lacuna might be partially filled as follows: 'I'm afraid he can never in this way understand <his own behaviour in continuing the debate... He may simply choose to maintain his thesis while in practice continuing to> blame or praise.' I am not persuaded by the first half of this proposal: the determinist's (inconsistent) behaviour would be explained precisely by the fact that it is necessitated.

⁸ εἰ γὰρ τις καὶ τῷ νουθετεῖν καὶ τῷ νουθετεῖσθαι τὴν κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον ἀνάγκην προστιθεῖ ἂν τοῦ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχοντος, μὴ οὐχὶ ποτε δύνηται ταύτη συνιέναι <...> μεμψόμενος ἢ

The possible defence of the determinist envisaged here is that our practice of praising and blaming is itself fully necessitated, being part of an unbreakable causal chain which ultimately escapes human responsibility. Epicurus replies that his opponent, by continuing acting in ordinary ways and leaving that practice intact is guilty of what we might call *pragmatic inconsistency*: his theory clashes with his life, what he believes (or claims to believe) is incompatible with what he does and what this implies.⁹ Epicurus' opponent might protest that this diagnosis is incorrect: he still praises and blames other people not because he holds them responsible, but because he remains somehow compelled to do so by necessity, and so his behaviour cannot be taken to reveal the kind of beliefs which ordinarily underlie it. Granted, this would mean admitting that for some reason the determinist's belief in determinism has no causal efficacy on his own behaviour, which seems to be particularly difficult to accommodate in the framework of determinism itself, but the determinist could mention other factors or motivations (such as habit, social convenience or utility) as the ones which prevail in determining his behaviour.

A lacuna of approximately forty-five words interrupts the flow of the argument, which resumes just before our self-refutation argument:

τ46 For this sort of λόγος is turned upside-down back-to-front (περικάτω γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος λόγος τρέπεται), and can never establish that everything is of the kind called 'by necessity'; but he [sc. the determinist] opposes someone on this very issue as if he [sc. his opponent] were talking nonsense on account of himself (ὥς δι' ἑαυτοῦ ἀβελτερευόμενος).¹⁰ (20C5)

The determinist's thesis is here explicitly spelled out for the first time: everything is necessitated (κατ' ἀνάγκην) and thus, we can infer from τ44, nothing occurs by chance and, what is worse, nothing depends on us. Epicurus' unnamed target, then, is someone who endorses a radical form of universal necessitation which seems to exclude any autonomous human agency independent of 'genetics' and environment. In τ46 Epicurus objects that the sort of λόγος which aims at establishing such a thesis περικάτω

ἐπαινῶν· ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν τοῦτο πράττει, τὸ αὐτὸ ἔργον ἂν εἴη καταλείπων ὃ ἐφ' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ποιῇ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας πρόληψιν.

⁹ On my reading, Epicurus first presents a broader charge of pragmatic inconsistency between his opponent's overall behaviour and his theory (20C3–4: τ45), and subsequently a related but more specific charge of self-refutation based, as we shall see, on the inconsistency between his opponent's attitude in supporting and defending his thesis and his thesis itself (20C5: τ46).

¹⁰ περικάτω γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος λόγος τρέπεται, καὶ οὐδέποτε δύναται βεβαιῶσαι ὥς ἐστὶν τοιαῦτα πάντα οἷα τὰ κατ' ἀνάγκην καλούμενα· ἀλλὰ μάχεται τινι περὶ αὐτοῦ τούτου ὥς δι' ἑαυτοῦ ἀβελτερευόμενος.

τρέπεται; what is this λόγος and why, and in what sense, is it 'turned upside-down back-to-front'?

Burnyeat was the first to notice that, as far as our scanty evidence can suggest, περικάτω τρέπεται must have been early Epicurean jargon to depict that kind of self-refutation which would be subsequently expressed, more frequently, through the single-prefix verb περιτρέπιν or the substantive περιτροπή (cf. p. 96 above).¹¹ He also argued that although Epicurus 'is the first writer we know of to use the vocabulary of reversal to mark self-refutation as a distinct type of argument', we cannot establish 'whether and how far he was innovating' (1978: 202). What is clear is that Epicurus' περικάτω τρέπεται originally combines the simple idea of around or back-to-front (περί) reversal, which would survive and flourish in the περιτροπή jargon until the end of antiquity, with the idea of turning upside down (κάτω), which had precedents in earlier self-refutation arguments.¹² On Burnyeat's reading, Epicurus' strategy in τ46 consists in objecting 'that the thesis of determinism refutes itself because to advocate it in philosophical debate involves treating one's opponent as responsible for his own stupidity in denying it: if the determinist imputes any kind of responsibility to himself or to his opponent, his action belies his thesis that responsibility cannot exist' (1978: 202).

Once again, I believe that Burnyeat's succinct analysis is on the right track, but might benefit from some clarification, adjustment and expansion. To begin with, I am not persuaded that the λόγος undergoing reversal must be, narrowly, the determinist's *thesis*; Epicurus' precise wording is that the self-refuting λόγος cannot 'establish' necessitarianism, so it is difficult to imagine that the λόγος is the mere thesis 'Everything is necessitated' or a statement of it.¹³ Sedley, persuaded by Burnyeat that 'thesis' is the correct

¹¹ περικάτω τρέπεται, which will be translated by Lucretius into a famous self-refutation image (cf. τ119 on p. 314) which I shall discuss in part III, chapter 15, section 1, occurs again in active form in another passage of the twenty-fifth book of Epicurus' *On Nature* (Arrighetti 1973: 35.11, Laursen 1995: 92), too fragmentary to be interpreted, but similarly concerned with determinism and mental events (for a conjectural attempt to interpret the passage along lines different from self-refutation cf. Masi 2006: 107–12). The noun περικατωτροπή is attested only once, again in an Epicurean context, at Phld. *Sign.* 30, 15 (cf. τ53 on p. 167). Arrighetti's translation of περικάτω τρέπεται as 'si riduce a un circolo vizioso' (1973: 348) misses the point: vicious circularity and reversal are completely distinct phenomena.

¹² Cf. Plato's τ2 on p. 32 (ἐαυτοῦς καταβάλλειν) and τ3 on p. 35 (αὐτὸν ἀνατρέπειν) and Democritus' τ116 on p. 309 (καταβάλλεις, κατάβλημα).

¹³ One might try to escape this difficulty by understanding, like Masi (2006: 97) and unlike Burnyeat and Sedley, 'the determinist', and not λόγος, as the unstated subject of οὐδέποτε δύναται βεβαιῶσαι (since 'the determinist' must be in any case the unstated subject of the following μάχεται τινι).

translation of λόγος here, refers in support of this to a sort of non-technical summary of T46's argument to be found in Epicurus' *Vatican Sayings*:

T47 The man who says (ὁ λέγων) that everything comes about by necessity (κατ' ἀνάγκην) cannot even criticise (ἐγκαλεῖν) the man who says that not everything comes about by necessity; for he is saying that this is itself something coming about by necessity.¹⁴ (SV 40)

According to Sedley (1983a: 26n25), since 'here λέγων, which corresponds to λόγος, indicates mere assertion and not argument', λόγος in T46 must refer to the bare assertion of the determinist's thesis too. But while in T47 the assertion of the necessitarian thesis is kept clearly distinct from the (incompatible) criticism that the determinist might be tempted to level against his opponent, λόγος in T46 seems to include such a criticism: by his λόγος the determinist is actively opposing his adversary as if he were responsible for *talking nonsense*, and is not neutrally presenting his thesis.

One might reply that the determinist's λόγος is a thesis that does not include any criticism of (and thus involuntary apportioning of responsibility to) its opponent, but necessarily involves it simply by being advanced in a dialectical context, and that Epicurus' text is sufficiently underdetermined to allow this reading. Although this would give us all the elements sufficient for Epicurus' argument to make sense, I believe it does not leave him with the best possible argument. For on this reading one might object to Epicurus' strategy that it is intolerably question-begging against determinism to assume that merely presenting one's thesis in dialectical exchange, or even arguing in its favour and against one's opponent's position, must involve treating oneself as morally responsible for one's own correct views and one's opponent as blameworthy for his error. I can criticise and denounce the falsehood of my opponent's views without thereby holding *him* responsible for having them or criticising and blaming *him* on account of their falsehood: I can consider them the necessary and unfortunate result of his congenital intellectual make-up and the kind of environment and education he has been exposed to (in fact, one does not need to be a determinist to believe that we are not responsible, and thus we do not deserve praise or blame, for *some* of our beliefs and attitudes). If I endorse a kind of determinism of the sort which might be the target of Epicurus' criticism, it is perfectly consistent on my part to argue in favour of it and try to persuade my non-determinist opponent, and still maintain that my opponent

¹⁴ ὁ λέγων πάντα κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεσθαι οὐδὲν ἐγκαλεῖν ἔχει τῷ λέγοντι μὴ πάντα κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεσθαι· αὐτὸ γὰρ τοῦτο φησι κατ' ἀνάγκην γίνεσθαι.

is not ultimately responsible, and thus should not be praised or blamed, for his current mistaken beliefs or even for whether he will be convinced by my arguments or will stick to his original position. My own arguing and its effects, whatever they happen to be, can be conceived of as part of 'the accidental'¹⁵ necessity of that which surrounds and penetrates him' (20C2).¹⁶

T47, which has been quoted in support of the idea that λόγος in T46 must be the bare determinist thesis as advanced in a debate, allows for the possibility of asserting determinism without thereby automatically apportioning merit and blame: if you assert the determinist thesis, you have no room for *additionally* criticising your opponent without inconsistency, but you are not automatically falling into inconsistency or refuting yourself. For this reason, I suggest that Sedley's account of the logic of T46's argument in terms of a form of pragmatic self-refutation based on the idea that 'to defend determinism is to treat the parties to the debate as undetermined agents' (1983a: 27) misses the real kernel of Epicurus' argument. To defend determinism is not in itself self-refuting; it is actively *blaming* your opponent for *his* alleged error in the process of promoting and defending determinism that condemns you to reversal. If you blame me, and not necessity, for my misguided beliefs about free agency, then you implicitly admit that I am ultimately responsible at least for something, these very beliefs, which are 'up to me' (παρ' ἐμὲ); but then you are tacitly committing yourself to the contradictory of your own thesis that

¹⁵ On the meaning and significance of κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον here cf. Masi 2006: 119–24.

¹⁶ My argument here is based of course on a certain interpretation of what form of determinism is in the dock. I am resisting especially O'Keefe's view that Epicurus' target is some sort of fatalist, and that the self-refutation argument runs as follows: 'Epicurus believes such a position denies that our reasoning is efficacious. And to offer an *argument* which denies the efficacy of reasoning *does* seem self-refuting in a way in which offering an argument for determinism is not. . . Even if the proposition "human reason is not effective" is not self-contradictory – and even if to *assert* that proposition is not self-contradictory – to *argue* for it does seem to be self-refuting' (2002: 165–6). It seems to me that to say that everything occurs by necessity and nothing is παρ' ἡμῶν need not imply that 'human reason is not effective' in the sense that our arguments can have no effect upon the mind of our interlocutor, unless we want to attribute an extremely crude and weak brand of necessitarianism to Epicurus' opponent (cf. however nn. 27 and 28 on p. 155); it might simply imply that the mind of our interlocutor is not to be considered the *ultimate* and real cause of its current state and of the effect my arguments will have on it. To express this difference in terms of speech act theory (cf. e.g. Austin 1962 and Searle 1969), on O'Keefe's reading there would be an inconsistency between the intended perlocutionary force of the determinist's arguments (persuading his opponent on the basis of reason), and its presuppositions, and the locutionary content of those arguments, while on my reading it is the implications of one fundamental illocutionary aspect (blame) of the speech act that conflict with its locutionary content. For further criticism of O'Keefe's interpretation of the determinist's position cf. Wendlandt and Baltzly 2004: 48–51.

everything is κατ' ἀνάγκην and nothing is 'up to us'.¹⁷ The same criticism applies to Bobzien's analogous comment that in T46 'the opponent faces the charge that he pragmatically refutes himself when he argues his position of universal necessitation . . . Epicurus' main argumentative step is this: when someone evaluates a person's act morally or veridically, they implicitly attribute causal responsibility to that person for that act' (2000: 301, italics mine). Once again, it seems unfair to assume against determinism that whenever you evaluate my beliefs as false you are thereby implicitly attributing to me responsibility for holding those false beliefs.¹⁸ It is only when you reproach me for my beliefs that you are clearly committing yourself to the idea that I am responsible, and this is why – I suggest – Epicurus is very careful in emphasising that the determinist does not propose his thesis with a neutral attitude towards his opponent, but opposes him by using strongly charged evaluative language ('You are talking nonsense!', rather than, for example, 'The anti-determinist position you are putting forward is incorrect').

The choice itself of the label 'pragmatic self-refutation' for Epicurus' argument in T46¹⁹ might be misleading, at least if we understand it on the basis of Mackie's formal analysis of self-refutation, which since Burnyeat has been the unchallenged benchmark in studies on ancient self-refutation. In pragmatic self-refutation, intended *à la* Mackie, the way in which a proposition is presented supposedly falsifies the proposition presented,²⁰ which

¹⁷ A better formulation of T46's self-refutation charge can be found in Long and Sedley 1987: vol. 1, 108: 'his [sc. the determinist's] critical attitude in this very debate still implies what he wishes to deny, that the parties to the debate are responsible for their own views' (italics mine). For a similar account cf. Vander Waerdt 1989: 240. The point that the critical attitude of the determinist is fundamental for the reversal is not emphasised by Burnyeat (1976a: 57): 'the idea seems to be that the possibility of discussion presupposes that determinism is false, at least with regard to beliefs, so that it is self-refuting to advocate determinism in discussion'.

¹⁸ *Contra* Morel 2000: 72: 'Le nécessaire, pour soutenir la vérité de sa propre thèse, doit supposer, contre celle-ci, non seulement que l'adversaire est responsable de sa propre position théorique, mais encore qu'il est lui-même l'auteur des ses propres assertions.'

¹⁹ Cf. also Annas 1992: 127. According to Annas, the determinist's position is pragmatically self-refuting because if reductivist determinism (Annas' interpretation of Epicurus' opponent's position) is true 'there is really no such thing as arguing, criticizing, and so on; what we think to be such is "nothing but" atoms moving in the void in the way they have to move. However, the reductivist argues against Epicurus to this effect, states and defends his view, criticizes Epicurus for getting it wrong, and so on. And all this undermines his thesis, since it presupposes that the thesis is mistaken' (for a reconstruction along the same general lines cf. Wendlandt and Baltzly 2004). But Epicurus' focus in T46 and T47 is clearly on what the determinist can and cannot say about his opponent (he cannot place the blame for his opponent's error on him, but he must say that the error is itself necessitated), and not on what the determinist himself is doing when arguing for determinism (considerations concerning the determinist's own behaviour and whether it is itself necessitated will enter the picture only in the following section of the text, after the self-refutation argument: cf. T48 below).

²⁰ There is actually an ambiguity in Mackie's own account of pragmatic self-refutation, to which I shall return in my detailed discussion in the next chapter.

might have been true otherwise. On the contrary, the determinist might be debating, inconsistently, in ways which commit him to the existence of human responsibility; but the fact that he acts *as if* his thesis were false does not mean that his thesis is false or inconsistent (we do not know yet which of the incompatible views he is unwittingly binding himself to is true and which false).²¹ While *he* has been properly defeated, by self-refutation, *his thesis* has not been thereby definitely disproved: if while debating I angrily shout at you that discussion must always be civil, this does not mean that what I am shouting is false or that it should not be followed as a rule.

In fact, none of Mackie's types of self-refutation successfully captures Epicurus' argument. Nor will Burnyeat's account of dialectical self-refutation accomplish the task: in dialectical self-refutation it is the very act 'of submitting a thesis for debate . . . that shows it up as false',²² whereas here the determinist is defeated because of the *particular way* in which he approaches the debate. This is not to say that the dialectical framework is unimportant here; just as in the case of the arguments we have examined in part 1, the distinctive trait of Epicurus' strategy is that he does not try to prove the falsehood of the determinist's thesis *in vacuo*, but the self-defeating character of his λόγος. And this λόγος, I have argued, does not coincide with that bare thesis, but also include, more broadly, the arguments in support of it, the arguments against the opposite thesis and, crucially, a certain evaluative tone and attitude which the determinist adopts towards his opponent.²³ In this sense, the self-refutation argument requires some critical dialectic between the determinist and his opponent,²⁴ although not necessarily an actual dialectical exchange by question and answer.

I have cast some doubts on certain details of Burnyeat's reconstruction of T46's self-refutation argument on the basis of the principle of charity: since it would be question-begging to assume that standing behind one's thesis in debate necessarily involves treating one's opponent as (causally and morally) responsible for his incorrect views, let us not attribute to Epicurus an argument resting on such an assumption, if possible at all. On my reading, Epicurus would be free from this charge: he would be relying

²¹ Sedley, who speaks of pragmatic self-refutation, makes it abundantly clear that he does not intend to say that whenever the determinist defends his thesis in debate determinism is thereby proved to be false.

²² Burnyeat 1976a: 59, italics mine (cf. p. 98).

²³ For a similarly broad sense of λόγος cf. T2 on p. 32, T3 on p. 35, and p. 174.

²⁴ Cf. Gill 2006: 195.

on the fact that the determinist's λόγος does include an explicit critical attitude towards its opponent. But is not this, at best, a purely contingent historical fact? Perhaps Epicurus' unnamed target did exhibit that self-refuting confrontational approach to philosophical discussion; but must the determinist thesis be presented in that dress? Could it not be expressed in an evaluatively neutral language, thus eluding Epicurus' charge? Or, even better, a determinist could add an explicit caveat to the effect that he does not blame his adversary for his mistaken views on human agency, although he wishes, therapeutically, to eradicate and correct them. Epicurus seems to be sensitive, at least in some measure, to these possibilities, and in the following part of his digression he tries to show how the determinist would not be much better off anyway. To begin with, he voices the possible retort that what the determinist does (including opposing and reproaching Epicurus for his anti-determinism) is itself fully necessitated (we have met the same retort in T45 in the context of the previous charge of pragmatic inconsistency). Epicurus immediately replies that this line of defence would entangle the determinist in a sort of infinite regress:

T48 And even if he goes on *ad infinitum* saying that, in turn, he acts in this way by necessity, always on the basis of arguments, he is not reasoning empirically in so far as he ascribes to himself the responsibility for having reasoned in the correct way and to his opponent that for having reasoned in the incorrect way. But unless he were to desist from ascribing the things he does to himself and he were to pin them on necessity...²⁵ (20C6–7)

Sedley persuasively conjectures that something like 'he would not even be consistent' followed in the lacuna: 'if the determinist is to restore consistency he must eventually halt the regress and cease to claim the credit for reasoning correctly' (1983a: 26). Something like that radical reform of some everyday attitudes such as praise and blame, which I have suggested as a possible escape route for the determinist, is envisaged at the end of T48. But how successfully? While I do not agree that once the determinist adopts such a stance 'it is indeed hard to see what grounds he could have left for believing his thesis to be correct' (1983a: 26), certainly this detachment is a dauntingly difficult, and perhaps even non-human, condition to try to live.²⁶

²⁵ καὶ εἰς ἄπειρον φηὶ πάλιν κατ' ἀνάγκην τοῦτο πράττειν ἀπὸ λόγων αἰεὶ, οὐκ ἐπιλογίζεται ἐν τῷ εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὴν αἰτίαν ἀνάπτειν τοῦ κατὰ τρόπον λελογίσθαι εἰς δὲ τὸν ἀμφισβητοῦντα τοῦ μὴ κατὰ τρόπον. εἰ δὲ μὴ ἂ ποιεῖ ἀπολήγοι εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν ἀνάγκην τιθεῖ...

²⁶ Cf. Strawson (1962: 197), according to whom the suspension of reactive attitudes such as blaming, condemnation, resentment and remorse dictated by this position ('pessimist determinism'), although

In the following fragmentary section of the text (20C8–12) Epicurus repeatedly insists that in using the word 'necessity' of that which happens 'through ourselves' the determinist is merely quibbling over words: for example, normally we refrain from attempting anything in the face of counter-acting necessity, but the determinist is still trying to persuade us of the truth of determinism while saying that everything, including our beliefs, is necessitated. Clearly for Epicurus not even the determinist's extreme decision to renounce apportioning credit and blame would count as a sufficiently radical change in behaviour: there are other essential features of our preconception of what is necessitated (notably, that we cannot have any influence whatsoever upon it) that would make even the reformed determinist's behaviour incompatible with his necessitarian thesis.²⁷

After a mention of 'the first men who gave a satisfactory account of cause, men not only much greater than their predecessors but also, many times over, than their successors' (quite clearly the founders of atomism, Democritus and Leucippus), followed by criticism of them for having held 'necessity and accident responsible for everything' (20C13–14),²⁸ the digression ends. The reference to the first αἰτιολογικοί and their disappointing epigons allows us to conjecture that the unnamed opponents of Epicurus might indeed have been Democriteans (possibly fourth-century BC figures such as Nausiphanes).²⁹ This is of some importance for our attempted reconstruction of the history of self-refutation: if Epicurus was targeting Democriteans, adopting against them a reversal argument would have been a *ben trovato*, because their master was himself keen on self-refutation arguments, and in fact among the first to use them, as we have discovered from our analysis of S.E. *M* 7.389–90 (T23 on p. 95) in chapter 6 and we shall see

not 'self-contradictory' or 'absolutely inconceivable', is, 'for us as we are, practically inconceivable' and beyond human nature.

²⁷ At this stage of the argument Epicurus' reasoning seems to target a form of crude necessitarianism that looks more like the form of 'fatalism' (things could not be otherwise than they will be, whatever we do or happens) which O'Keefe (2002) sees as the target of the self-refutation argument (cf. n. 16 above and n. 28 below).

²⁸ Epicurus' criticism is twofold: they turned a blind eye to themselves, because introspection reveals the freedom of human agency (20C13), and their actions were inconsistent with their doctrines (another charge of pragmatic inconsistency, based this time on the argument that a consistent follower of necessitarianism 'would be falling into desperate calamities' (20C14), presumably because any decision and action on his part should appear redundant to him; such an argument, which clearly would require a very crude form of fatalism as its target to be effective, is a variation on the typical anti-septical motif of *apraxia* ('inactivity') and has a close resemblance to the so-called Lazy Argument, on which cf. Bobzien 1998: 180–217). For analysis of different reconstructions of the passage cf. Masi 2006: 144–57.

²⁹ Sedley 1983a: 29–36. For possible alternatives cf. Masi 2006: 152–7.

again in part III, chapter 15. But perhaps we can push the conjecture a little bit further. Epicurus is 'the first writer we know of to use the vocabulary of reversal', as Burnyeat (1978: 202) claims, if we assume that the use of περιτρέπιν in T23 is a Sextan anachronism; however, I suggested in chapter 6 that we should not exclude the hypothesis that Democritus himself was the first to use περιτρέπιν for self-refutation. Since Democritus did use the verb καταβάλλειν (and the substantive κατάβλημα) to depict an upside-down self-refutation tumble (cf. T116 on p. 309), we might speculate that Epicurus inventively combined two different Democritean self-refutation metaphors into his περικάτω τρέπεται imagery, and cleverly turned it against Democritus' followers.³⁰ Alternatively, περικάτω τρέπιν might have been borrowed, just like καταβάλλειν, directly from wrestling jargon: it is tempting to conjecture that περικάτω τρέπιν labelled some upside-down back-to-front heave and throw of the adversary, perhaps exploiting the adversary's own excessive attacking thrust against him. Although our knowledge of the nomenclature of ancient wrestling and *pankration* techniques is too scanty to confirm (or falsify) my conjecture,³¹ we do have some evidence for a particular kind of pancratiastic heave for which, I suggest, περικάτω τρέπιν would have been the perfect label:

The entry to this technique [sc. a 'reverse waist lock'] can be from a lunge of the athlete, possibly after evading – by changing levels – an attack at head-level by the opponent. From a reverse waist lock set from the front . . . the athlete lifts and *rotates* his opponent using the strength of his hips and legs . . . Depending on the torque the athlete imparts, the opponent becomes more or less *vertically inverted, facing the body of the athlete* [i.e. the direction opposite to the one which he was initially facing] . . . To finish the attack, the athlete has the option of either *dropping the opponent head-first* to the ground, or driving him into the ground while retaining the hold. (Georgiou 2005: vol. II, 100, 105, italics mine)

Both the waist lock and the subsequent upside-down back-to-front heave are clearly illustrated, respectively, on a red-figure wine-cooler (c. 520–515 BC) representing two wrestlers training in a palaestra (figure 1) and on a metope of the temple of Hephaestus in Athens (449–415 BC) representing Theseus wrestling with Kerkyon (figure 2).

³⁰ Independently of the conjecture that Democritus introduced the περιτροπή jargon, at least the upside-down aspect of the reversal (κάτω) might have been Democritean inheritance.

³¹ Cf. the literature listed in n. 15 on p. 36. In a similar vein, one might speculate that περικάτω τρέπιν was a piece of *gymnastic* jargon: I shall come back to this possibility when analysing Lucretius' rendering into Latin of Epicurus' verb in part III, chapter 15, section 1 (T119 on p. 314).

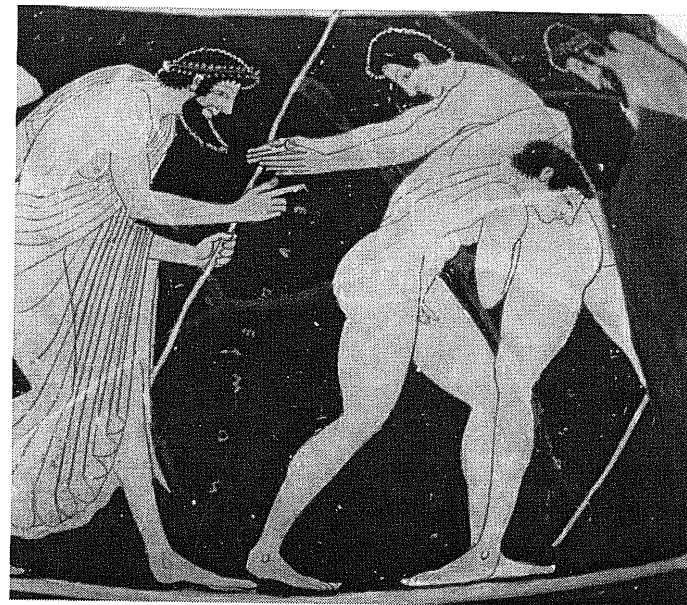


Figure 1 Attic red-figure *psykter* (c. 520–515 BC), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (inv. 01.8019) – detail of two wrestlers training in a palaestra (reverse waist lock).

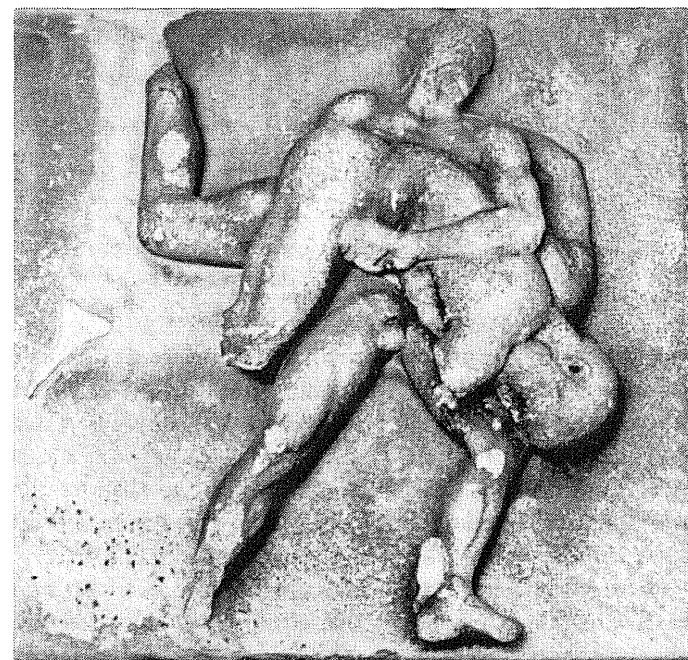


Figure 2 Metope of the temple of Hephaestus, Athens (449–415 BC) – Theseus wrestling with Kerkyon (upside-down back-to-front heave).

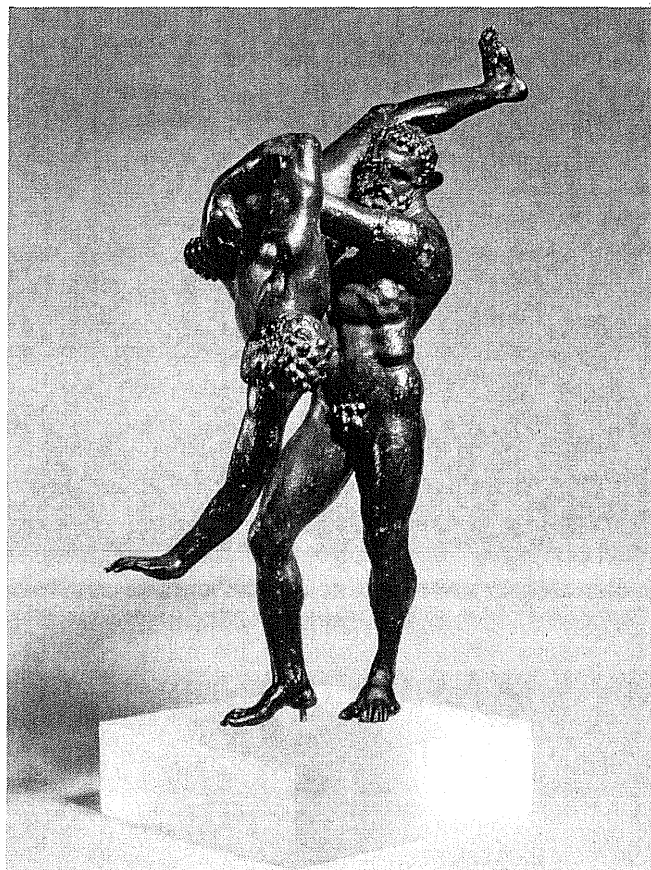


Figure 3 Hellenistic bronze figurine, Archaeological Museum, Athens (ΑΙΓ 2548) – wrestler's upside-down back-to-front heave of his opponent.

A slight variant of the heave, in which the 'inverted' opponent ends up facing away from the athlete (but again, presumably, in the direction opposite to that towards which he was attacking), is shown in a Hellenistic age bronze figurine (figure 3).

However this may be, clearly by combining two distinct directions of reversal Epicurus' περικάτω τρέπεται aimed at conveying the point that the determinist's λόγος is *completely* overturned, i.e. it is turned into its contradictory opposite. I suppose it might have been no more than linguistic factors (the anomaly of this compound) that determined its extinction and the survival and flourishing of the simpler περιτρέπειν.

I conclude with a cursory additional remark on the distinctiveness of Epicurus' approach to self-refutation. The modern literature on the alleged self-refuting character of determinism is huge, and it is impossible to offer a satisfactory overview of it here.³² To limit myself to a haphazard handful of examples, it is sometimes objected that determinism is incompatible with the existence of any intentional behaviour, thus no one can assert that it is true without incurring pragmatic self-refutation;³³ some claim that if determinism is true, then the very concept of truth becomes incoherent, so determinism cannot be true;³⁴ determinism is often accused of inconsistency with the existence of proofs or conclusive reasons for believing anything, hence any attempt to prove it will be self-refuting;³⁵ or, if determinism were true, there could be no argument whose soundness could be established, so any argument in support of determinism defeats itself;³⁶ or, again, since asserting is an inherently normative act prescribing a certain reaction (your audience is expected to accept what you say) and it would make no sense to prescribe something unless the person to whom the prescription were addressed could freely choose to conform to it, to assert determinism is self-refuting.³⁷ This list could have been much longer; however, it is worth noticing that I could not include any clear modern example of self-refutation charge against determinism in which the concepts of praise and blame play the same central role as in Epicurus' original argument in T46.³⁸

³² Such an overview is made even more difficult of course by the variety of the distinct 'deterministic' positions targeted by the various formulations of the self-refutation argument.

³³ Cf. e.g. Malcolm 1968. ³⁴ Cf. e.g. Ripley 1972. ³⁵ Cf. e.g. Snyder 1972.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. Jordan 1969. ³⁷ Cf. e.g. Boyle 1987.

³⁸ These concepts are central in Strawson's (1962) seminal depiction and criticism of 'pessimist determinism' (cf. p. 154n26), but not in the framework of a *self-refutation* argument.

CHAPTER 10

*Anti-sceptical dilemmas: pragmatic or
ad hominem self-refutations?*

Whether the philosophical use of *περιτρέπειν* originated within the fourth-century BC atomist tradition or not (cf. p. 155 above), a much later author, Sextus Empiricus,¹ is certainly our single most valuable source for *περιτροπή* arguments. In part 1, chapter 6 I analysed several arguments from the Sextan *corpus* thematically related by their being levelled at theses concerning truth and falsehood. The arguments I shall examine in this chapter are collected on the basis of a different criterion: they have all been interpreted as ancient instances of the charge of pragmatic self-refutation. Before deciding whether this interpretation is correct, and what it amounts to, we need to give a closer look, finally, at what exactly pragmatic self-refutation is supposed to be.

According to Mackie, who is followed by most commentators on ancient self-refutation,² we have pragmatic self-refutation when 'the way in which something is presented conflicts with what is presented. For example, if I say that I am not saying anything, what I say is false; it is *falsified* by the very way in which I put it forward' (1964: 193, italics mine). Mackie explains that 'I am saying that' can be replaced with 'any proposition-forming operator upon propositions' *d*, such as 'I am writing that', 'It can be proved that', 'I sometimes think that'; for example, if I write 'I am not writing' on a piece of paper, the content written is falsified by the very way I present it.

I suggest there is a potentially dangerous ambiguity lurking in the phrase 'the way in which something is presented', and consequently in Mackie's analysis of pragmatic self-refutation. That account risks conflating (or at least might be easily taken to be conflating) two distinct senses of the phrase:

- (1) the way in which a proposition is presented according to or in the intention of the person who presents it (*as* a genuine statement, *as* a real inscription, *as* a proved conclusion . . .);

- (2) the *actual* way in which a proposition is presented (*through* a genuine statement, *through* a real inscription, *through* an actual proof . . .).

One might protest that, after all, the ambiguity is only superficial, since it is sufficient to consider carefully the details of Mackie's formal reconstruction of the logic of pragmatic self-refutation to understand that he must be intending the incriminated phrase in the second sense I have just distinguished. For, on that reconstruction, pragmatic self-refutation is determined by the fact that, for any operator *d*,

$$d(\neg(\exists p)dp) \rightarrow (\exists p)dp$$

is a logical law, being a straightforward instance of existential generalisation (for example, if I write that there is nothing that I am writing, then there is something that I am writing, i.e. this very thing). Given such a law, Mackie explains, 'whenever an item occurs which can be symbolized by $d(\neg(\exists p)dp)$, it is self-refuting in the sense that what this *d* here operates on, what is represented by $\neg(\exists p)dp$, must be false'; 'it is not the *proposition* symbolized by $d(\neg(\exists p)dp)$ that we should call self-refuting, but rather the actual operation which it describes, such as my writing that I am not writing. And even this is self-refuting only in that its occurrence refutes its content, its noun clause. There is no bar to the actual occurrence of this operation' (1964: 194). Reading (1) above could never warrant the key step of existential generalisation: if in the preface I present my book as a piece of elegant English prose in the first sense, unfortunately this is far from guaranteeing that there exists a piece of elegant English prose which I have composed.

The ambiguity I have denounced seems to have misled not only some of those who adopted Mackie's account of pragmatic self-refutation, as we shall discover shortly, but also Mackie himself on at least one occasion, when he writes that 'if the claim that the senses are totally misleading is put forward with the support of an argument whose premisses include the results of certain sensory observations, then this procedure is pragmatically self-refuting' (199). For pragmatic self-refutation to occur, on the reading (2) which is suggested by Mackie's own formal analysis, there should be some reliable sensory observations attesting that no sensory observations are reliable: but this is something impossible, the occurrence of which is barred, like the existence of a sound proof that no sound proof exists³ (in Mackie's own terms, 'There is some reliable sensory evidence showing that

³ Although Mackie lists 'It can be proved that' among the operators which can be involved in pragmatic self-refutation, 'It can be proved that nothing can be proved' is, according to Mackie himself, absolutely self-refuting (195), and thus the operation of (soundly) proving that no (sound)

¹ For Sextus' uncertain dates cf. p. 95n1. ² Cf. e.g. Burnyeat 1976a: 52, McPherran 1987: 293.

no sensory evidence is reliable' is absolutely self-refuting).⁴ As we have seen, however, according to Mackie there should be no bar to the actual occurrence of the operation which is called pragmatically self-refuting. What Mackie has in mind here must be the different situation in which someone (let us call him 'the Sceptic') purports to prove the complete unreliability of the senses, but in order to do so avails himself of sensory observations, as if they could be used to establish any conclusion reliably. The occurrence of such a situation cannot prove the falsehood of the proposition 'The senses are completely unreliable' (nothing excludes the possibility that the sensory observations used by the Sceptic are misleading), but it does show that the Sceptic is liable to the charge of inconsistency if he tries to dismiss the reliability of the senses through sense-based evidence, which he himself must be supposing to be reliable.⁵ But in pragmatic self-refutation the propositional content should be unmistakably *falsified* by the *actual* way in which it is presented:⁶ Mackie's example, then, cannot be considered a genuine instance of pragmatic self-refutation if we stick to the interpretation of the ambiguous 'the way in which something is presented' which is imposed by his own formal reconstruction.⁷ Unfortunately, there is no category left in Mackie's taxonomy under which such a case can be classified, unless we widen pragmatic self-refutation so as to include those cases in which no actual falsification of the propositional content occurs.

proof exists cannot occur, and thus 'nothing can be proved' cannot be falsified through pragmatic self-refutation intended in the second way. I shall return to this point and offer some important qualifications concerning it in part III, chapter 14, section 3.

⁴ 'There is reliable sensory evidence that . . . ' seems to be a truth-entailing operator. On absolute self-refutation cf. part I, chapter 2.

⁵ The Sceptic might protest that he is appealing to sensory evidence only 'strategically', for a *reductio ad absurdum* of his opponent: it is his opponent who insists on the reliability of the senses, so the Sceptic can avail himself of sensory evidence against the senses, without thereby considering it reliable *in propria persona* (cf. p. 169 below and part III, chapter 14, section 3.7).

⁶ Notice, however, that in Mackie's definition the concept of conflict and that of falsification coexist. For the idea that a 'performatively inconsistent statement' – a category including both pragmatic and operational self-refutation (cf. chapter 13, section 1) – 'is falsified by some aspect of its utterance' cf. also Boyle 1972: 31.

⁷ Another example of pragmatic self-refutation proposed by Mackie which does not fit his own formal account is the following: 'G. E. Moore has argued that to say that the commonsense view of the world is false is to presume that there is a commonsense view of the world, and this itself presupposes the truth of some of the main parts of the commonsense view . . . In fact what we have here is only a pragmatic self-refutation. The man who says that the commonsense view of the world is false is presenting something in a way which *conflicts* with what is presented; but this *does not show that what is presented is false*, or even that it cannot be coherently presented in some other way – here, by explicitly denying the particular parts of the commonsense view which the speaker rejects' (1964: 199, italics mine). Here the way in which the proposition is put forward is not expressible by any proposition-forming operator, being the way in which it is phrased (i.e. its very reference to the 'commonsense view of the world'); moreover, the propositional content pragmatically self-refuted is not falsified, as Mackie himself recognises.

Mackie might have avoided the ambiguity I have indicated by preserving a useful distinction which Passmore had drawn in his earlier informal analysis of self-refutation. Passmore distinguished pragmatic self-refutation from what he labelled '*ad hominem* self-refutation': 'an argument . . . in which one person's *admission* that he is speaking or thinking – as distinct from *the fact that* he is speaking or thinking [which is involved in pragmatic self-refutation] – is used as an argument to show that what he is speaking or thinking cannot be in fact the case, we could perhaps dignify with the name of an *ad hominem* self-refutation' (1961: 63). As Passmore clarified, 'an *ad hominem* self-refutation . . . draws attention to an inconsistency – and a bringing out of crucial inconsistencies is an important philosophical procedure – but does not tell us which of the inconsistent propositions is true' (1961: 65–6): in other words, the propositional content of the self-refuting speech act is not falsified by its very performance. What we could say is that the speaker appears to be committed to the falsehood of that propositional content given the way he himself characterised his own speech act – cf. (1) above – or the way in which his speech act can reasonably be characterised in light of the context of its performance. Hereby, I shall use '*ad hominem* self-refutation' in a way similar to Passmore's, in opposition to (strict) pragmatic self-refutation as formalised by Mackie,⁸ and not in accordance with the more popular usage of informal fallacies theories, in which an *ad hominem* argument is an attempt to impugn one's opponent's views or arguments by somehow denigrating his person, character and motivations ('abusive *ad hominem*').

Let us consider now whether these elucidations can improve our understanding of a first presumed Sextan example of pragmatic self-refutation:

τ49 And he who says that there is no cause incurs reversal (περιτρέπεται δὲ ὁ λέγων μηδὲν αἴτιον εἶναι); for if he states that he says (φησὶ λέγειν) this simply and without any cause (ἀπλῶς καὶ ἄνευ τινὸς αἰτίας), he will not be credible (ἄπιστος); but if for some cause (διὰ τινὰ αἰτίαν), while wishing to deny the cause he affirms it (βουλόμενος ἀναιρεῖν τὸ αἴτιον τίθησιν) by offering a cause for which there is no cause (ἀποδιδούσῃ αἰτίαν δι' ἣν οὐκ ἔστιν αἴτιον). (PH 3.19)

Should we analyse this περιτροπή charge in terms of pragmatic self-refutation, as some have done? My answer is 'no'.¹⁰ To begin with, let us be extremely attentive to the exact phrasing of τ49: we are not told that

⁸ For an analogous distinction within the notion of operational self-refutation cf. p. 221.

⁹ I follow Annas and Barnes (2000: 148); the MSS have ἀποδιδόσθω.

¹⁰ *Contra* Burnyeat 1976a: 51, McPherran 1987: 293, Nuchelmans 1991: 19–20. Burnyeat (1976a: 54) does recognise the existence of some distinction analogous to the one I have drawn between

if it is for some cause that one says that there are no causes then the way in which one claims that there are no causes (i.e. for some cause) is itself confirmation of the existence of causes, thus falsifying the content of what is said. What the text does say is that if someone *states that he says* (φησι λέγειν) that there are no causes for some cause he is thereby committing himself to the contradictory of his thesis, i.e. that some cause exists.¹¹ The nested duplication of the verbs of saying with infinitives is crucial: διὰ τινος αἰτίαν is not the reason why the thesis is in fact presented, but the reason offered by its supporter to explain why he presents it ('I say there are no causes because . . .').¹² In other words, what we find in T49 is not an instance of pragmatic self-refutation, but resembles much more closely Passmore's *ad hominem* self-refutation. I speak of strong resemblance, and not identity, because T49's argument does not limit itself to unmasking an inconsistency between what is said and how it is supposedly said, but uses the latter to force the opponent into admitting the falsehood of the former. Once again, the dialectical framework and its rules are fundamental to the self-refutation argument: to persuade your interlocutor that no cause exists, you cannot limit yourself to assert your thesis, but you must somehow justify why you assert it, thus exposing yourself to the περιτροπή manoeuvre. It is an interesting question why περιτροπή seems to be presented here as an inescapable fate even for someone who goes for the first horn of the

pragmatic and *ad hominem* self-refutation, but he conflates the two procedures under Mackie's single label 'pragmatic self-refutation', and argues that, despite some lack of clarity on this point, the charges of περιτροπή recorded by Sextus must assume real falsification of the refuted thesis by the *actual* manner in which it is put forward (thus pragmatic self-refutation in our strict sense). Nuchelmans writes that in *PH* 3.19 the περιτροπή 'is made possible by the fact that a state of affairs that is precluded by the propositional content of the thesis actually obtains in the process of putting forward that thesis' (1991: 20), thus clearly thinking of strict pragmatic self-refutation. McPherran also refers to *PH* 3.28 as an instance of pragmatic self-refutation, but the occurrence of περιτρέπεται there does not indicate self-refutation at all.

¹¹ There is some lack of clarity on whether 'for some cause' qualifies one's saying that no cause exists, as the construal of the passage seems to indicate, or the non-existence itself of causes, as the final words (αἰτίαν δὲ ἢν οὐκ ἔστιν αἴτιον) suggest. In light of the parallel anti-dogmatic dilemma at *PH* 3.23–4 and of the parallel passage T50 which I shall analyse shortly, the former reading seems to be preferable, so the ending of T49 is best understood as shorthand for 'by offering a cause for which <he says> there are no causes' (*contra* Burnyeat 1976a: 51, McPherran 1987: 293). This vagueness is innocuous and easy to explain: it is unlikely that in this context the proposed cause for one's saying that causes do not exist is 'psychological' (e.g. 'I have been convinced by my trusted teacher', or 'I want to surprise you'); the proposed cause will rather coincide with the reasons why one can conclude that causes do not exist, which might be also described as the cause why causes do not exist. In connection with this, note the use of the two distinct terms αἴτιον and αἰτία, although this need not reflect exactly the distinction between the object responsible for an effect and the propositional account of it (cf. Frede 1980).

¹² Otherwise, the first horn of the dilemma would be unpersuasive: the fact that there is no cause for which my interlocutor says what he says is insufficient to denounce what he says as unconvincing unless I am somehow made aware of this fact.

dilemma, bare assertion. In this way he will fail to persuade his adversary, but he does not seem to be thereby committing himself to his adversary's position.¹³

One might protest that my interpretation of T49, built on the minute details of Sextus' phrasing, cannot survive the comparison with a parallel passage in *Against the Physicists*:

T50 And he who says that cause does not exist says this either without a cause or with some cause (μετά τινος αἰτίας). And if <he says this> without any cause, he is not credible . . . But if <he says so> with some cause, he incurs reversal (περιτρέπεται), and in the act of saying that no cause exists he affirms the existence of some cause (κάν τῷ λέγειν μὴ εἶναι τι αἴτιον τίθησι τὸ εἶναι τι αἴτιον).¹⁴ (*M* 9.204)

There is no iteration of verbs of saying here: very simply, if it is with some cause that one says that there are no causes, then at least one cause, that very cause, exists. Surely περιτροπή here must indicate a form of strict pragmatic self-refutation, then, as opposed to *ad hominem* self-refutation; and since T50 is clearly a parallel of T49, we should look back with some suspicion also at my reading of T49.

Such a diagnosis is hasty. There is, indeed, a crucial difference between the arguments in T49 and T50, but it resides in their phrasing, not in their logic: while in T49 the preposition used was διὰ, with the accusative, here we find μετά, with the genitive, and this is not to be explained away as an example of Sextus' well-documented taste for *variatio*. To say that cause does not exist *with* (μετά) some cause cannot be equivalent to saying that cause does not exist *for* (διὰ) some cause: whereas one can say that cause does not exist on the basis of some cause but without mentioning this cause at all, saying that cause does not exist with some cause must involve denying the existence of cause and at the same time *adding* a cause for this denial.¹⁵ The reason why in T50 a single λέγει occurs, instead of something like T49's φησι λέγειν, then, is that the use of the preposition μετά in lieu of διὰ would make the duplication redundant. But the logic

¹³ According to Burnyeat, it is 'likely' either that Sextus has been careless in arranging the components of his argument or that the verb *peritrepein* carries its broader meaning 'to refute' (1976a: 52n16). I will offer a possible solution to this puzzle below on pp. 175–6.

¹⁴ ὁ τε λέγων μὴ εἶναι αἴτιον ἥτοι χωρίς αἰτίας τοῦτο λέγει ἢ μετά τινος αἰτίας. καὶ εἰ μὲν χωρίς τινος αἰτίας, ἀπιστός ἐστιν . . . εἰ δὲ μετά τινος αἰτίας, περιτρέπεται, κἀν τῷ λέγειν μὴ εἶναι τι αἴτιον τίθησι τὸ εἶναι τι αἴτιον.

¹⁵ Just as in T49, there might be some uncertainty here on whether the cause mentioned is a cause for saying that cause does not exist or for the non-existence of cause (cf. n. 11 above). A subsequent description of the περιτροπή move suggests the first option: 'he who says that no cause exists is moved by some cause when he says so' (*M* 9.206).

of the argument is identical: if someone says that there is no cause and at the same time mentions some cause for this, he is thereby conceding the existence of at least one cause, refuting himself. It is immaterial for the argument whether the cause presented is a real one or not: what is important for this *ad hominem* strategy is that it is proposed as such by the denier of causes. It is worth noticing that in this case nothing bars the possibility that a real cause exists why one denies the existence of causes. It is a logical impossibility (by absolute self-refutation), on the contrary, that there should be a real cause why no cause exists.

I suggest that exactly the same argument pattern as in T50 underlies this passage:

T51 But in reply to this the dogmatists customarily enquire how on earth the Sceptic asserts that there is no criterion. For he says this either without a criterion or with a criterion (μετὰ κριτηρίου); and if without a criterion, he will not be credible, whereas if it is with a criterion, he will incur reversal (περιτραπήσεται), and while saying that there is no criterion he will admit (ὁμολογήσει) he is adopting a criterion to confirm this.¹⁶ (M 7.440)

To claim that no criterion exists, i.e. that no trustworthy means are available to discriminate true and false impressions and judgements, and at the same time to agree to mention something as a criterion confirmatory of the truth of one's claim, will condemn one to περιτροπή, quite independently of whether the criterion mentioned is really trustworthy or not. Strict pragmatic self-refutation is not in the picture here:¹⁷ we ought to be puzzled if it were, since a trustworthy criterion by which we can be assured that no trustworthy criterion exists – what would be needed for strict pragmatic self-refutation to occur – looks like a logical chimaera.¹⁸

A similar line of reasoning might apply to another interesting περιτροπή argument reported by Sextus:

T52 The very thesis which attacks them [*sc.* apparent things (φαινόμενα)] is reversed by itself (ὁ κινῶν αὐτὰ λόγος αὐτὸς ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ περιτρέπεται). For it denies them by employing either mere assertion, or apparent things, or things not apparent. But if it employs assertion, it is not credible; for it is easy to put forward the contradictory assertion. And if it employs things not apparent, again it is not credible, since it attempts to overturn the apparent things by things not apparent. And if it is by apparent things that it attacks

¹⁶ ἀλλ' εἰώθασιν ἀνθυποφέροντες οἱ δογματικοὶ ζητεῖν, πῶς ποτε καὶ ὁ σκεπτικὸς τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι κριτήριον ἀποφαίνεται. ἤτοι γὰρ ἀκρίτως τοῦτο λέγει ἢ μετὰ κριτηρίου· καὶ εἰ μὲν ἀκρίτως, ἄπιστος γενήσεται, εἰ δὲ μετὰ κριτηρίου, περιτραπήσεται καὶ λέγων μὴδὲν εἶναι κριτήριον ὁμολογήσει εἰς τὴν τούτου παράστασιν κριτήριον παραλαμβάνειν.

¹⁷ Pace Burnyeat 1976a: 51, McPherran 1987: 293, La Sala 2005: 139. ¹⁸ Cf. n. 5 above.

apparent things, these must be absolutely credible (πάντως πιστοῖς), and so the apparent things will at once be credible.¹⁹ (M 8.360–1)

If one chooses to argue against the reliability of φαινόμενα on the basis of φαινόμενα, these will be reliable: this is an only too obvious *non sequitur* unless one understands its conclusion as shorthand for 'these must be reliable *for the person using it*' (or 'these must be accepted as reliable at least by him'), thus opening the way to a reversal consisting in that person's inescapable *admission*, on the basis of what he has said, that some φαινόμενα must be reliable.²⁰ If my analysis is correct, we have here a περιτροπή argument exactly in the same pattern as the argument that, as I have argued on pp. 161–2, Mackie misclassified as pragmatic self-refutation, but is actually closer to Passmore's forsaken *ad hominem* self-refutation. The same strategy emerges in this passage from Philodemus' *De Signis* (On Signs):

T53 And first he [an Epicurean, possibly Demetrius of Laconia]²¹ said that those who use dialectical arguments do not know that somehow they are shamefully incurring reversal (περιτρεπομένους). For the arguments which they [*sc.* the above-mentioned opponents of the Epicureans] devise to refute the method of similarity (τὸν κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τρόπον) they present as confirmations of it . . . they appear to be making the inference from similars and it is the same also in the other cases, so that as a result there is an upside-down back-to-front reversal (περικατωτροπήν).²² (Sign. 29, 24–30, 15)

I cannot engage here in discussion of the complex debate on the correct method of inference staged by Philodemus in the first century BC on the basis of at least three earlier Epicurean sources, and partially preserved

¹⁹ ὁ κινῶν αὐτὰ λόγος αὐτὸς ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ περιτρέπεται. ἤτοι γὰρ φάσει μόνον χρώμενος ταῦτα ἀναιρεῖ ἢ φαινόμενοις ἢ μὴ φαινόμενοις. ἀλλὰ φάσει μὲν χρώμενος ἄπιστός ἐστιν· ῥάδιον γὰρ τὴν ἀντικειμένην ἐκθέσθαι φάσιν. εἰ δὲ μὴ φαινόμενοις, πάλιν ἄπιστος θέλων διὰ μὴ φαινόμενων τὰ φαινόμενα περιτρέπειν. εἰ δὲ φαινόμενοις κινεῖ τὰ φαινόμενα, πάντως πιστοῖς, καὶ οὕτως αὐτόθεν ἔσται τὰ φαινόμενα πιστά.

²⁰ If one understood κινεῖν as a 'success verb' ('removes', 'refutes'), as opposed to my chosen translation 'attacks' which has the conative nuance of 'tries to refute', it would be sensible to say that if certain φαινόμενα succeed in refuting something they must be reliable. However, not only would this reading clash, once again, with the fact that trustworthy φαινόμενα establishing that *no* φαινόμενα are trustworthy cannot exist; the symmetry of the trilemmatic argument of T52 would be broken, since the first two horns take into account possible ways to attack (and not successfully refute) φαινόμενα. Note the non-technical use of περιτρέπειν in the second horn, which clearly does not indicate a self-refutation.

²¹ Cf. De Lacy and De Lacy 1978: 161.

²² καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἔφη τοὺς χρώμενους ταῖς ἐπιχειρήσεσιν ἀγνοεῖν τρόπον τινὶ περιτρεπομένους ἀσχημόνως. οὓς γὰρ συντιθέασιν λόγους τὸν κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τρόπον ἀθετοῦντες, τούτους βεβαιωτάς αὐτοῦ παριστάνουσιν. . . τὴν μετὰ βαςιν ἀπὸ τῶν ὁμοίων φαίνονται ποιούμενοι, παραπλησίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ὥστε τὴν περικατωτροπήν ἔχει συνακολουθοῦσαν.

for us in the thirty-eight columns of continuous text of the Herculanean papyrus 1065.²³ Its fundamentals are well-known,²⁴ and we can reconstruct the logic of the self-refutation argument in T53 even in the absence of definite answers to important questions such as that of the identity of the anonymous opponents of the Epicurean inductive 'similarity method' who get charged with self-refutation.²⁵ Philodemus' Epicurean points out that the detractors of the similarity method fail to realise that they rely heavily on analogical inferences from known empirical data whenever they try to disprove the soundness of that method,²⁶ thus disregarding their own charges and involuntarily committing themselves to the contradictory of their own thesis, i.e. to the admission that the Epicurean similarity method can deliver reliable inferences after all. The form of the arguments they adopt speaks loudly against what those arguments are meant to establish, and works as unwitting confirmation of what they purport to undermine, condemning 'those who use dialectical arguments' to a disgraceful and complete reversal, which Philodemus, with a nice touch of Epicurean orthodoxy, calls περικατωτροπή at the end of T53.²⁷ This reversal cannot amount to absolute proof that the similarity method is reliable; rather, it brings home the point that it is self-defeating to try to shake the credibility of that method through attacks based on similarity itself. In principle nothing prevents one from proving that the similarity method is unreliable by making use only of inferences which are not based on that method. Once again, then, this is not a case of strict pragmatic self-refutation in which the actual way in which a thesis is supported falsifies the thesis itself. T53 relies on a different assumption, of a kind we are now familiar with: the inferences based on similarity which are exploited to undermine the similarity method must be conceded to be reliable by anyone who uses them, since it is a rule of rational discourse that when you offer reasons you are committing yourself to their soundness. This is not to deny that you can also try to trick your interlocutor by using inferences

²³ For the text of Philodemus' work and an overview of this debate cf. De Lacy and De Lacy 1978.

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Sedley 1982, Asmis 1984: 197–211, Barnes 1988, Long 1988b, Allen 1998, Manetti 2002.

²⁵ These opponents, who espouse the so-called 'elimination (ἀνασκευή) method' of inference, might be second-century BC Stoics (including probably Dionysius of Cyrene, who seems to be mentioned at *Sign.* 7, 5 and 11, 13). For the different diagnosis that the opponents might be Academics cf. Asmis 1984: 198; for an agnostic take on the problem cf. Barnes 1988.

²⁶ A similar charge is levelled against Dionysius at 11, 20–3, but in the absence of any self-refutation vocabulary. The same point is used in an interestingly different way at *Sign.* 10, 1–26 (T118 on p. 312).

²⁷ Cf. T46 on p. 148. In T53 Philodemus also employs περιτρέπειν, which by the time he writes had probably become standard jargon in the philosophical arena outside the Garden.

you believe or know to be unsound, in the hope that this will escape his notice; but, once challenged, you cannot elude a self-refutation indictment like that sketched above by granting that actually you yourself deem those inferences unreliable. In this way, you would be admitting that your attacks were devoid of any credibility, and you would be confessing to dialectical behaviour either irrational or consciously dishonest.

This whole thread of reasoning which clearly underlies T53's περικατωτροπή charge will sound extremely naïve to some readers. There is a typical scenario in which one would seem to be fully authorised to use inferences based on similarity without thereby committing oneself in the least to the reliability of similarity: this is exactly the case in which what one is trying to prove is the unreliability of the similarity method, and the path one has chosen is that, most elegant and effective, of *reductio ad absurdum*. You, my dear Epicurean, claim that reasoning by similarity is reliable; but, on the basis of this assumption, which is *your* assumption, I can prove to you that exactly the contradictory follows. But if from your thesis such a contradiction follows, that thesis must be false: the similarity method is thus unreliable, *quod erat demonstrandum*.

The Epicurean of T53 either ignores, surprisingly, the existence of this way of countering his self-refutation charge,²⁸ or is bluffing brazenly; and since the same retort might apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the structurally parallel argument in Sextus' T52, the same can be said of the anonymous anti-sceptical proponents of that argument. Could there be any reason, other than wishful thinking, for those who used these reversal arguments to ignore the disastrous comebacks apparently left open to their adversaries? What I have just sketched would not be any old *reductio*, but that special form of it in which the absurdity consists in a contradiction between the initial thesis and its contradictory consequence: the thesis *p* ('the similarity method is reliable') entails $\neg p$ ('the similarity method is not reliable'). In other words, the countermove about which our sources remain silent would look like a refutation by *Consequentia Mirabilis*. I have discussed at length the extremely shadowy status of CM in ancient logic in part 1, chapter 6, section 1; one might conjecture that the silence of T52 and T53 is a consequence of that status, and indeed provides corroboration that CM was off the maps of ancient dialectic and logic.²⁹ On the other hand,

²⁸ As suggested by, e.g., De Lacy and De Lacy 1978: 103n40 and Allen 1998: 337.

²⁹ Note, however, that strictly speaking $\neg p$ ('the similarity method is not reliable') follows *p* ('the similarity method is reliable') and the further assumption *q* that there is some argument based on the similarity method that concludes that the similarity method is unreliable.

independently of the possible difficulties in formulating it in the exact logical form of CM, it seems difficult to believe that the argument I have sketched above would have been unavailable to ancient thinkers. In part III (chapter 14, section 3.7) I shall argue that Sextus did use at least once an argument of that kind in reply to an anti-sceptical dilemmatic charge of περιτροπή.

But let us now return to the main thread of this chapter. When we come to other Sextan passages the question of whether the underlying logic of περιτροπή is that of pragmatic or *ad hominem* self-refutation becomes thornier:

Τ54 For from saying that sign does not exist it follows saying that a sign exists (τῷ γὰρ λέγοντι μὴ εἶναι σημεῖον ἀκολουθεῖ λέγειν εἶναι τι σημεῖον). For if no sign exists, there will be a sign of this very thing, that no sign exists. And reasonably so: for he who says that no sign exists says this either by mere assertion or with a proof. And if he claims this by assertion he will have <against him> the contradictory assertion; but if he proves as true what he says, through the argument proving that no sign exists he will signify that no sign exists, and in doing so he will be admitting (ὁμολογήσει) that a sign exists.³⁰ (M 8.281–2)

Although the περιτροπή vocabulary does not occur here, this passage is later back-referenced by Sextus as follows: 'He who says, sceptically, that no sign exists was reversed (περιετρίπετο), according to them [*sc.* the dogmatists], into saying (εἰς τὸ λέγειν) that a sign exists' (8.295).³¹ Is this reversal the result of what the Sceptic actually does when presenting the thesis against the existence of sign or of what he admits he is doing? This time we would be tempted to subscribe to the first option: the kernel of the argument appears to be that if one proves that no sign exists this very proof confirms the existence of sign, since proof (ἀπόδειξις) is a species of the genus of sign (8.277). Real and not merely purported proof of the non-existence of signs seems to be at stake in Τ54.

However, as usual, the story is not quite so simple. To begin with, if proof is a species of sign, the existence of a sound proof of the non-existence of signs sounds no more possible than the existence of a triangle with four sides: Τ54's pragmatic self-refutation charge would presuppose

³⁰ τῷ γὰρ λέγοντι μὴ εἶναι σημεῖον ἀκολουθεῖ λέγειν εἶναι τι σημεῖον. εἰ γὰρ μὴδὲν ἔστι σημεῖον, αὐτοῦ τοῦ μὴδὲν εἶναι σημεῖον ἔσται τι σημεῖον. καὶ εἰκότως· ὁ γὰρ λέγων μὴ εἶναι τι σημεῖον ἦτοι φάσει μόνον τοῦτ' ἀξιοῖ ἢ ἀποδείξει. καὶ φάσει μὲν ἀξίων φάσιν ἔξει, τὴν ἀντιτιθεμένην ἀποδεικνύς δὲ ὡς ἀληθὲς τὸ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ λεγόμενον, διὰ τοῦ δεικνύντος λόγου τὸ μὴ εἶναι τι σημεῖον, σημειώσεται τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι σημεῖον, τοῦτο δὲ ποιῶν ὁμολογήσει τὸ εἶναι τι σημεῖον.

³¹ ὁ δὲ λέγων μὴ εἶναι τι σημεῖον σκεπτικῶς περιετρίπετο κατ' αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ λέγειν εἶναι τι σημεῖον.

the existence of something which cannot exist.³² One might reasonably object that this can hardly be conclusive evidence for a different exegesis, unless we noxiously overdose on charity: if we were to freely reinterpret the logic of an argument wherever on its straightforward reading it appeared intolerably unsound, ancient (and modern) texts would probably turn out to be full of sound, albeit awfully phrased, reasoning. However, our passage Τ54 leaves some room for reasonable doubt. By doing what one does, i.e. proving (and thus signifying) that no sign exists, Sextus says, one 'will be admitting that a sign exists': whereas the first part smacks of pragmatic self-refutation, the second one suggests an *ad hominem* reading, since, strictly speaking, it is not sufficient to prove something to commit oneself to the admission of the existence of proofs and signs. By proving the non-existence of signs (supposing this is possible, for the sake of argument) you would be proving the existence of signs, but you would not thereby be admitting it, unless you first grant that what you have done is to produce a proof (and thus a sign).

Τ54's περιτροπή looks like an inconsistent mixture of causes of (impossible) pragmatic self-refutation with outcomes of *ad hominem* self-refutation. Is this to be blamed on the anonymous promoter of that charge,³³ or on Sextus' muddled report? In light of the tendency to ellipticity of Sextan prose we have previously appreciated in similar cases, both here and in chapter 6, we cannot exclude the possibility that Τ54's argument may be best interpreted by normalising it into a fully *ad hominem* shape. If the denier of the existence of signs merely asserts his thesis, he will have no stronger claim to truth than his opponent who counter-asserts the opposite; if he purports to prove his assertion (i.e. produces arguments intended to be sound proofs of it and to be recognised as such by his audience), he is thereby purporting to produce a sign (of the non-existence of signs), thus unwittingly conceding, by περιτροπή, that signs do exist.³⁴

³² Pace La Sala 2005: 139. I shall return to this point and then qualify it in part III, chapter 14, section 3.7.

³³ As we have seen, the argument is attributed to no better specified 'dogmatists'. I shall return below to the question of the paternity of the anti-sceptical dilemmas.

³⁴ It must be added, however, that the PH version of Τ54's argument, at 2.131, is consistently formulated along the lines of pragmatic self-refutation: 'Moreover the arguments against the sign are either demonstrative or non-demonstrative. But if they are not demonstrative they do not prove that sign does not exist; and if they are demonstrative, since proof belongs to the genus of sign, being revelatory of the conclusion, sign will exist' (ἔτι ἦτοι ἀποδεικτικοὶ εἰσιν οἱ λόγοι οἱ κατὰ τοῦ σημείου ἢ οὐκ ἀποδεικτικοί. ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν οὐκ ἀποδεικτικοί, οὐκ ἀποδεικνύουσι τὸ μὴ εἶναι σημεῖον· εἰ δὲ ἀποδεικτικοί, ἐπεὶ ἡ ἀπόδειξις τῷ γένει σημείων ἔστιν, ἐκκαλυπτική οὖσα τοῦ συμπεράσματος, ἔσται σημεῖον). In part II, chapter 14, section 3.3 I shall show that even such an argument can be interpreted as an elliptical formulation of *ad hominem* περιτροπή.

The ancient debate over the existence of signs fathered another argument worth analysing:

τ55 The vocal sounds³⁵ proffered against the sign either signify something or signify nothing. And if nothing, neither will they eliminate the existence of the sign: for how is it possible that, while not signifying anything, they are credible regarding the non-existence of sign? But if they signify, the Sceptics turn out to be fools, since in words they reject the sign, but in practice they adopt it (λόγω μὲν ἐκβάλλοντες τὸ σημεῖον, ἔργῳ δὲ τοῦτο παραλαμβάνοντες).³⁶ (*M* 8.279)³⁷

This time the conflict is between what one says (λόγῳ) and what one does (ἔργῳ) when saying it: exactly the core of pragmatic self-refutation. Notice, however, that the only explicit charge levelled against the Sceptic here is that of foolishness, clearly for adopting an inconsistent stance, and not of περιτροπή. As in some of the previous cases, one might wonder whether it is possible that the denials of the existence of signs really 'signify'. The answer is not straightforward. If by 'to signify' we intend 'to have a sense', it is certainly possible to utter the signifying (i.e. meaningful) sentence 'No sign exists': the fact that this sentence signifies does not imply the truth of what it signifies. If by 'to signify' we intend 'to be a sign of', i.e. to reveal the existence of some actual, albeit non-evident, object or matter of fact, then it is not possible to signify the non-existence of signs and fall into strict pragmatic self-refutation. This distinction partially mirrors the ancient distinction between commemorative (ὑπομνηστικά) and indicative (ἐνδεικτικά) signs,³⁸ which Sextus himself adopts to reply to τ54's and τ55's arguments. The Sceptics do not object to commemorative signs, but only to indicative ones, and their arguments against signs are in fact commemorative signs of the non-existence of indicative signs, by reminding the Sceptics what can be said against indicative signs; they are not supposed to be indicative signs revealing the non-existence of indicative signs (cf. *M* 8.289–90).

Before proceeding, let us take stock of some results acquired. The bulk of the passages we have inspected in this chapter concur in corroborating and refining our picture of περιτροπή as an intrinsically dialectical manoeuvre,

³⁵ For the meaning of the term φωναί cf. part III, chapter 14, section 2.

³⁶ ἤτοι σημαίνουσι τι αἱ κατὰ τοῦ σημείου ἐκφερόμεναι φωναί ἢ οὐδὲν σημαίνουσιν. καὶ εἰ μὲν οὐδὲν, οὐδὲ τὴν τοῦ σημείου ὑπαρξιν ἀνελοῦσιν· πῶς γὰρ οἶόν τε τὰς μὴδὲν σημαίνουσας πιστεύεσθαι περὶ τοῦ μὴδὲν εἶναι σημεῖον; εἰ δὲ σημαίνουσιν, μάταιοι καθεστᾶσιν οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως, λόγῳ μὲν ἐκβάλλοντες τὸ σημεῖον, ἔργῳ δὲ τοῦτο παραλαμβάνοντες.

³⁷ For a parallel passage cf. *PH* 2.130. ³⁸ Cf. Allen 2001: 87–146.

as opposed to some logical property of propositions or style of formal demonstration:

- (1) What is usually charged with reversal is a *person* who says something (τ49, τ50, τ53, τ54: ὁ λέγων κτλ; τ51: ὁ σκεπτικός . . . λέγων).³⁹ When the subject of περιτροπή is a λόγος (τ52), it is clear that an actual *statement* is being referred to, and not an abstract proposition or unasserted thesis.⁴⁰
- (2) The person who will incur περιτροπή always has an interlocutor, who must be persuaded and who is ready to oppose him. The *setting* is *dialectical*.
- (3) The reversal consists in the fact that the person who states that *p* ends up *admitting* that not-*p* in the act of, or as a consequence of, stating that *p*. There is no indication that the proposition *p* is thereby falsified in an absolute sense, i.e. proved to be false on the basis of premisses which are self-evident or would be generally accepted as true by everyone independently of the dialectical context.⁴¹
- (4) All the different examples analysed share the same general cause of περιτροπή: broadly speaking, the person who claims that *p* does so in a way which commits him to the admission of not-*p*. This 'way' varies from case to case: adding a cause for what he says, trying to prove it, relying on apparent things as evidence, uttering significant words to express his position.
- (5) The reversal is usually imposed by the dialectical framework: it is the need to avoid bare assertion that presses the interlocutor eventually incurring reversal to present his thesis in the way which will doom him. And bare assertion is to be eschewed, typically, because it fails to be persuasive (τ49, τ50, τ51, τ52, τ55) and the opponent can simply counter-assert its contradictory with equal (un)persuasiveness (τ52, τ54).⁴²

³⁹ Cf. also other Sextan passages we have analysed in part I: τ23 on p. 95 and τ33 on p. 113.

⁴⁰ Cf. also another Sextan passage we have analysed in part I: τ31 on p. 112.

⁴¹ Cf. also the περιτροπή arguments analysed in part I, chapter 6.

⁴² Cf. Agrippa's fourth mode ('hypothetical') of suspension of judgement (cf. e.g. *S.E. PH* 1.168, 173), used here by the dogmatists against the Sceptics (for the connection between 'hypothesis' and 'bare assertion' cf. *M* 3.7 and Barnes 1990: 97). According to Nuchelmans, the option of bare assertion shows that the procedure at stake here, although dialectically efficacious, is not 'a logically sound argument in the sense that the sceptical view is shown to be false' (1991: 19). Nuchelmans' point is correct but too narrow: not even when the Sceptic avoids bare assertion and thus gets caught in reversal is his thesis thereby falsified. Nuchelmans often calls περιτροπή a 'rhetorical device' (cf. e.g. 1991: 18–26): on the basis of what is consistently emerging in this study of ancient self-refutation, 'dialectical manoeuvre' seems to me a much more appropriate label.

Point (4) requires some discussion. Speaking of the 'way' in which a certain propositional content is put forward sounds rather inappropriate here, and a useless relic of a failed attempt to identify the ancient instances of περιτροπή we have analysed as cases of pragmatic self-refutation. Standard examples of 'ways' mentioned in modern discussions of pragmatic self-refutation are writing, uttering, silently thinking; but our passages often refer to more complex activities, like offering causes and attempting proofs, which are not, strictly speaking, 'ways of presenting' the propositional content subject to reversal (which is put forward, quite simply, by the speech act of assertion), but are themselves independent assertions or sets of assertions accompanying it. Connectedly, one could object that asserting that no cause exists and then candidly admitting to be asserting this for some cause is not being guilty of making a self-refuting statement, but of making two statements that are mutually *inconsistent*. Why should this be any different from the case of the person who claims that violence is always bad, and after a few seconds proclaims that it was absolutely right on his part to beat his wife in order to persuade her of the truth of his noble maxim? An important difference exists, however, between the two cases: as Burnyeat emphasises, 'reason-giving is not just another independent activity alongside the advancing of views... Even when reasons and views are given in temporally distinct utterances we understand them as meant to go together in propositions of the form "*p* because *q*"' (1976a: 53). Thus, it is not unreasonable to consider someone's act of advancing a thesis as 'inclusive of, not – as it would be in a present-day discussion of self-refutation⁴³ – exclusive of, the reasoning with which he supports his position' (53).⁴⁴

This brings us to point (5), which also deserves some further comment. No doubt the degree of respectability and success of a philosophical position is closely connected, ordinarily, to the quality and quantity of the reasons, explanations, proofs one can produce in its support; however, why should one not feel content with bare assertion if one realises that the nature of one's thesis is such that it does not tolerate other ways of presentation? In other

⁴³ Burnyeat's claim that 'Mackie would hardly countenance the presenting of a proposition with supporting reasons as a way of presenting it' (1976a: 53) overlooks Mackie's use of an example of that kind in his discussion of pragmatic self-refutation (cf. pp. 161–2). As I have explained, however, that example cannot be accommodated within Mackie's own formal analysis of pragmatic self-refutation.

⁴⁴ Cf. in particular T52, where the reflexive aspect is explicit ('the λόγος is reversed *by itself*'). For this wide-ranging sense of λόγος cf. also my analysis of T3 in part I, chapter 4, section 1 and p. 153. One might object that also in my fictional example it is to persuade his wife of what he was asserting that her principled husband hit her. But beating one's interlocutor, unlike providing him or her with reasons, clearly is not a constituent feature of our ordinary conception of competently advancing and defending a thesis in philosophical debate.

words, why exclude the possibility that bare assertion could represent the sole philosophically sound option in certain cases? If this were the case, one should limit oneself to asserting one's position, and let one's adversary check this assertion with the opposite one, if he cannot do better. Sometimes a draw can be even more welcome than a win; as Burnyeat writes, often 'the Sceptic's choice is between undergoing a reversal and swallowing a dose of his own medicine' (1976a: 53), i.e. suspension of judgement between equipollent contradictories; but it is not clear why the Sceptic should have qualms about swallowing *this* medicine.⁴⁵ Our texts seem to operate on the assumption that the burden of reason-giving lies heavily upon the participant in the discussion who eventually undergoes reversal: a subtly question-begging request if his view is, or implies, that no reason-giving is possible. However, this request is not arbitrary: first, the thesis under fire as self-refuting is usually a highly revisionary one, subverting what we might call our 'default' philosophical (and pre-philosophical) views, to which we certainly would stick in the absence of compelling reasons to abandon them; second, in the kind of dialectical exchange presupposed by our texts, reason-giving and the attempt to win debate are essential, since without such ingredients no real debate could even be said to take place. We will discover in part III that, in fact, far from withdrawing from the game of reason-giving, the ancient sceptics fully entered it and fought the dogmatists on their own ground, defusing their adversaries' charges of περιτροπή on the basis of a very different 'offensive' strategy.

In support of the reasons I have offered above to explain why bare assertion could not be accepted as a viable option, consider the following Sextan passage, in which the burden of the active role is switched, for once, to the dogmatist:

T56 And if he [*sc.* the dogmatist who claims that sign exists] cannot prove by a sign that a sign exists, he is forced by reversal into admitting (περιτρέπεται εἰς τὸ ὁμολογεῖν) that sign does not exist.⁴⁶ (M 8.296)

This peculiar use of περιτρέπεται might also account for the anomaly I had signalled on pp. 164–5: you can be forced into your opponent's position not only by what you inadvertently do, but also by what you *fail to do*.⁴⁷ An analogous line of reasoning can be detected in this argument by the Stoic Zeno of Citium (334–262 BC):

⁴⁵ We shall encounter and analyse examples of this willingness in part III.

⁴⁶ μὴ δυνάμενος δὲ ἀποδείξαι σημεῖον τὸ εἶναι τι σημεῖον, περιτρέπεται εἰς τὸ ὁμολογεῖν μηδὲν εἶναι σημεῖον.

⁴⁷ For a similarly loose use of περιτρέπεται cf. also M 10.18, analysed in Burnyeat 1976a: 56.

τ57 In response to him who said 'Do not pass judgement until you have heard both sides', Zeno stated the opposite, using an argument of the following kind: 'The second speaker must not be heard, whether the first speaker proved his case (for the inquiry has its end) or did not prove it (for that is like his not having complied when summoned, or his having complied by prattling). But either he proved his case or he did not prove it. Therefore the second speaker must not be heard.'⁴⁸ (Plut. *Stoic. Rep.* 1034E)

Zeno's apparently anti-dialectical argument, clearly inspired by the practice in judicial contexts, can be easily transposed to dialectical exchanges:⁴⁹ if your role is that of trying to refute a certain thesis, and your opponent's that of defending it, your failure to bring home your negative point is already the victory of your opponent and of the thesis he is defending, to which, in a sense, you become committed, independently of the strength (or weakness) of your opponent's positive reasons.⁵⁰ On the assumption that any form of endorsement of certain theses apart from bare assertion is doomed to περιτροπή,⁵¹ and unconvincing bare assertion also leaves you committed to your opponent's position (or is, at best, pointless), such theses would be banned from the dialectical arena as (literally) non-starters or necessary losers; given the paramount importance of debate in philosophy, and in the ancient approach to philosophy in particular, we could say they would be banned from philosophical discourse altogether.

There is a possible objection to my reconstruction of the strictly dialectical nature of the anti-sceptical περιτροπή arguments. Immediately after τ50, Sextus continues:

τ58 Hence it is also possible to propound⁵² with the same force . . . the argument which will have the following shape: (1) 'If a cause exists, cause exists; but also

⁴⁸ πρὸς τὸν εἰπόντα μὴδὲ δίκην δικάσης, πρὶν ἄμφω μῦθον ἀκούσης ἀντέλεγεν ὁ Ζήνων τοιοῦτον· τινὶ λόγῳ χρώμενος εἴτ' ἀπέδειξεν ὁ πρότερος εἰπὼν, οὐκ ἀκουστέον τοῦ δευτέρου λέγοντος (πέρας γὰρ ἔχει τὸ ζητούμενον), εἴτ' οὐκ ἀπέδειξεν (ὁμοιον γὰρ ὡς εἰ μὴ δ' ὑπήκουσε κληθεὶς ἢ ὑπακούσας ἐτερέτισεν). ἦτοι δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἢ οὐκ ἀπέδειξεν· οὐκ ἀκουστέον ἄρα τοῦ δευτέρου λέγοντος.

⁴⁹ Gucker (1989: 488) suggests that 'the anecdote as we have it is no piece of philosophical doctrine, taken out of one of Zeno's serious books, but an amusing χρεία'; certainly this does not imply, however, that the argument itself must be a mere sophistic joke, *pace* Gucker.

⁵⁰ Conversely, if your role is that of trying to establish a certain conclusion, and your opponent's that of refuting it, your success in supporting your positive point is already a clear-cut triumph for you and your thesis, independently of the strength (or weakness) of your opponent's reasons, which need not be assessed and countered. Plutarch goes on criticising Zeno's argument as overtly inconsistent with Zeno's own practice of writing against Plato and solving sophisms.

⁵¹ I have argued why this assumption is disputable: the kind of hypothetical endorsement at the basis of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments is not really liable to the charge of reversal.

⁵² For the exact import of the Greek verb (συν)ερωτᾶν which I translate as 'propound' here and in τ59 below cf. p. 282.

(2) if a cause does not exist, cause exists; and (3) either <a cause> exists or <a cause> does not exist; therefore (4) <cause> exists.'⁵³ (M 9.205)

The περιτροπή argument of τ50 is clearly supposed to guarantee the truth of the premiss (2) 'If a cause does not exist, cause exists', which – together with the two logical truisms (1) and (3)⁵⁴ – entails the existence of causes. It looks as if περιτροπή can be used, after all, to prove the truth of certain propositions, and not merely to stalemate one's dialectical opponent. But then, since τ58 should provide an alternative but ultimately equivalent ('with the same force') version of τ50's argument, our previous interpretation of περιτροπή must have been flawed.

Exactly the same seems to happen for the περιτροπή argument of τ54, which is said to secure the truth of the second premiss of a constructive dilemma in the same logical pattern as the one just seen:

τ59 Some also propound the following argument: '(1) If a sign exists, sign exists; (2) if sign does not exist, sign exists; but (3) sign either does not exist or exists; therefore (4) <sign> exists.'⁵⁵ (M 8.281)

Arguments equally shaped are proposed at *PH* 2.131, on the basis of the *PH* version of τ54,⁵⁶ and at *PH* 2.186 and *M* 8.466, building on the alleged reversal of the λόγος 'No proof exists', the analysis of which I postpone until part III (section 3 of chapter 14):

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| (1) $p \rightarrow p$ | If cause (sign, proof) exists, cause (sign, proof) exists |
| (2) $\neg p \rightarrow p$ | If cause (sign, proof) does not exist, cause (sign, proof) exists |
| (3) $p \vee \neg p$ | Either cause (sign, proof) exists or cause (sign, proof) does not exist |
| <hr/> | |
| (4) p | Cause (sign, proof) exists |

Something has gone wrong, but – I submit – it is not our analysis of περιτροπή. However charitable one might be, it seems that there is no reasonable way of interpreting the περιτροπή arguments on which we have

⁵³ ὅθεν καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς δυνάμεως ἑρωτᾶν ἔξεστι . . . λόγον, ὃς ἔξει τὴν σύνταξιν τοιαύτην· εἰ ἔστι τι αἴτιον, ἔστιν αἴτιον· ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰ μὴ ἔστι τι αἴτιον, ἔστιν αἴτιον· ἦτοι δὲ ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἔστιν ἄρα.

⁵⁴ Cf. n. 60 below.

⁵⁵ τινὲς δὲ καὶ οὕτω συνερωτῶσιν· εἰ ἔστι τι σημεῖον, ἔστι σημεῖον· εἰ μὴ ἔστι σημεῖον, ἔστι σημεῖον· ἦτοι δ' οὐδὲν ἔστι σημεῖον ἢ ἔστιν· ἔστιν ἄρα.

⁵⁶ Cf. p. 171n34.

sweated throughout this chapter in such a way as to guarantee the *literal* truth of conditionals like 'If a cause does not exist, a cause exists' or 'If sign does not exist, sign exists': my divergence with Burnyeat, McPherran and Nuchelmans on whether or not those arguments should be analysed as strict pragmatic self-refutations does not have any bearing on the present issue.⁵⁷ At first sight, either those who devised and proposed T58's and T59's dilemmatic arguments, and other parallel ones, were deeply confused, or it is Sextus who mistakenly draws the link between the key premisses of those arguments and περιτροπή (it is evident from the texts that, at any rate, the group of those adopting these arguments does not coincide with, and is possibly narrower than, the group of those using the περιτροπή manoeuvres).⁵⁸ For example, one might conjecture that the original rationale behind the premisses of the form (2) $\neg p \rightarrow p$ was the following different one: since there cannot exist any uncaused, non-signified and non-demonstrable matter of fact, if no cause exists there must be a cause for this, if no sign exists there must be a sign of this, if no proof exists there must be a proof of this. Needless to say, this would be a blatantly question-begging argument to marshal against the deniers of causes, signs and proofs, but at least it would not be a hopelessly irrelevant one.

Besides being unwarranted by those περιτροπή arguments which, according to Sextus' reports, should guarantee their key premisses, our constructive dilemmas face a difficulty which I have already discussed in part 1 (chapter 6, section 1). While their logical form is valid,⁵⁹ their key premiss (2), and consequently the soundness of the whole argument, is incompatible with 'Aristotle's Thesis' (AT) and 'Chrysippus' Thesis' (CT),

⁵⁷ William Kneale agrees that 'none of these attempts to refute scepticism is a genuine application of the *consequentia mirabilis*' (1957: 63); Burnyeat remarks that the supposition that the περιτροπή arguments establish that conclusion is the result of 'confusion... without excuse' (1976a: 54); Nuchelmans (1991: 21) comments that 'whereas it may indeed be granted that the formal validity of the whole pattern of argument is hardly open to controversy, it is surely questionable whether the proof of the second implication that is actually offered is capable of demonstrating something of the form "If not the first, then the first"... In order to make the consequent of that implication true, considerably more is needed by way of antecedent than a propositional content consisting in the simple negation of the consequent' (cf. also Baldassarri 1984: 260). *Contra* Gourinat 2000: 247–8, who has no qualms about speaking of *Consequentia Mirabilis* with reference to the anti-sceptical dilemmas.

⁵⁸ 'It is *also possible* to propound the argument...' (M 9.205); 'Some (τινὲς) also propound the following argument...' (M 8.281); 'Some (ἐνιοί) also propound the following argument...' (M 8.466).

⁵⁹ Sextus reports an argument against their 'conclusiveness' based on an alleged redundancy (παρολκή) in the premisses (M 8.292–4), but this need not concern us here.

which, I have argued, were probably defining features of Aristotle's conception of valid consequence and Chrysippus' analysis of true conditional proposition (συνημμένον). Connectedly, the truth of the pair of premisses (1) and (2) would represent a straightforward denial of 'Boethius' Thesis' (BT). If I was right, then, not only as a matter of fact are we not given any satisfactory justification for (2), but nothing could *ever* justify a premiss of that form in the eyes of at least the two most eminent logicians of antiquity. For the same reason, no analysis of the περιτροπή as a formal proof by *Consequentia Mirabilis* ($\neg p \rightarrow p \vdash p$) could ever be accurate, as I have explained previously. For whoever endorses AT, BT and CT, any argument in the shape of the dilemmas above – or any abridgement of them in the form of CM, by dropping the truistic premisses (1) and (3)⁶⁰ – will be materially false, because in virtue of its form and of the interpretation of the connectives it cannot have all its premisses true. In modern jargon, any such argument would be valid, but only 'degenerately' so, and thus could never be used as a sound proof⁶¹ (interestingly, at PH 2.188–92 Sextus objects to a dilemma of that form precisely on the grounds that its premisses are, given CT, 'mutually destructive').⁶²

So far I have carefully avoided attributing any identity to the proponents of the anti-sceptical dilemmas, since Sextus himself never specifies it:⁶³ 'some'⁶⁴ or 'the dogmatists'⁶⁵ are Sextus' only generic indications. However, the context, style and language of those arguments offer enough evidence to agree with those commentators who have assuredly identified these dogmatists as Stoics.⁶⁶ Consider also this clearly related inferential schema which Origen explicitly attributes to the Stoics:

⁶⁰ The justification advanced for (1) and (3) is unproblematic: (1) is true in virtue of it being a 'duplicated conditional' with antecedent and consequent identical; (3) is true because it is a disjunction formed of contradictory disjuncts (cf. M 8.281–2, 466–7; 9.206).

⁶¹ Cf. Frede 1974: 181–2: 'Bei den von S.E. diskutierten Schlüssen handelte es sich dann lediglich um freilich illegitime Spezifikationen dieser Schlussform.'

⁶² This is the passage in which CT is formulated (cf. T26 on p. 109). What Sextus concludes is actually that the dilemma is 'invalid' (ἀσύνακτος, οὐκ ὑγιής), and not false; however, also elsewhere – it does not matter here whether erroneously or not, or on the basis of what sources – he is ready to classify thus arguments which we would consider materially false but formally valid (e.g. the arguments invalid 'because of deficiency' (παρὰ ἑλλειψιν) of PH 2.150).

⁶³ *Pace* Burnyeat, who claims that 'the Stoic origin of these arguments is attested at M 7.445, 8.298, 470' (1976a: 51n14), perhaps misled by Bury's (1935) liberal insertions in his translation.

⁶⁴ Cf. n. 58 above.

⁶⁵ Cf. PH 2.133, 185, M 9.206.

⁶⁶ As for the context, for example, one might argue that PH 2.188–92 is already sufficient, albeit indirect, evidence for a Stoic attribution of the anti-sceptical dilemmas, since these are attacked in that passage on the basis of their inconsistency with συνάρτησις and CT. Unfortunately, this alone cannot settle the question, since Sextus might be using his typical strategy of attacking a dogmatic position setting it in opposition with the position of *other* dogmatists (cf. p. 185n79).

τ60 But when two conditional propositions have consequents which contradict each other, for the so-called theorem 'through two complex premisses' (διὰ δύο τροπικῶν)⁶⁷ the antecedent of both conditionals is denied... and the argument proceeds in the following way: 'If the first, also the second; if the first, not the second; therefore, not the first'. The Stoics also give a concrete example of this scheme: 'If you know that you are dead, you are dead; if you know that you are dead, you are not dead; it follows therefore that you do not know that you are dead'. They establish the conditionals in this way: if you know that you are dead, it is true what you know, therefore you are dead. And again: ... since whoever is dead does not know anything, it is clear that, if you know that you are dead, you are not dead. And it follows, as I have said, from both conditionals 'therefore, you do not know that you are dead'.⁶⁸ (Orig. *Cels.* 7.15)

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| (1) $p \rightarrow q$ | If you know that you are dead, you are dead |
| (2) $p \rightarrow \neg q$ | If you know that you are dead, you are not dead |
| <hr/> | |
| (3) $\neg p$ | Therefore, you do not know that you are dead |

It is obvious that if one accepts CT and BT the conditional premisses of a Stoic διὰ δύο τροπικῶν theorem could never both be true, and so this schema will only be degenerately valid, and thus useless as a demonstrative tool. What shall we make of this disturbing inconsistency, and of the similar one between our presumably Stoic dilemmas and CT, vocally denounced by Sextus? Let us explore some ways out of this impasse.

(A) Supposing that the Stoics did use arguments incompatible with a defining trait of their own conception of συνημμένον is probably the easiest answer, but certainly not the best one; it is almost outrageous to maintain that talented logicians like the Stoics could make such a blunder.

A more decisive piece of evidence is that when reporting the dogmatists' justification of the validity of those dilemmas or attacking them Sextus consistently uses Stoic technical jargon (e.g. τὸ πρῶτον, τὸ δεύτερον, τὸ ἡγούμενον, τὸ λήγον, συνημμένον, διεξευγμένον, διαφορούμενον, λήμματα, ἐπιφορά, συνάγειν, just to limit ourselves to the dogmatists' own justification of the validity of T59's dilemma at *M* 8.281–4).

⁶⁷ The Stoics called τροπικά disjunction, conditional and negated conjunction (cf. e.g. Gal. *Inst. Log.* 7.1).

⁶⁸ ὅταν δὲ δύο συνημμένα λήγη εἰς τὰ ἀλλήλοις ἀντικείμενα τῷ καλουμένῳ διὰ δύο τροπικῶν θεωρήματι, ἀναιρεῖται τὸ ἐν ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς συνημμένοις ἡγούμενον... καὶ ὑπάγεται γε ὁ λόγος τρόπῳ τοιούτῳ· εἰ τὸ πρῶτον, καὶ τὸ δεύτερον· εἰ τὸ πρῶτον, οὐ τὸ δεύτερον· οὐκ ἄρα τὸ πρῶτον. φέρουσι δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ ὕλης τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στωῆς, λέγοντες τὸ εἰ ἐπίστασαι ὅτι τέθνηκας, <τέθνηκας· εἰ ἐπίστασαι ὅτι τέθνηκας,> οὐ τέθνηκας· ἀκολουθεῖ τὸ οὐκ ἄρα ἐπίστασαι ὅτι τέθνηκας. τὸν τρόπον δὲ τοῦτον κατασκευάζουσι τὰ συνημμένα· εἰ ἐπίστασαι ὅτι τέθνηκας, ἔστιν ὃ ἐπίστασαι, ἔστιν ἄρα τὸ τέθνηκας. καὶ πάλιν... ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ τεθνηκὼς <οὐδὲν> ἐπίσταται, δῆλον ὅτι, εἰ ἐπίστασαι ὅτι τέθνηκας, οὐ τέθνηκας. καὶ ἀκολουθεῖ, ὡς προεῖπον, ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς συνημμένοις τὸ οὐκ ἄρα ἐπίστασαι ὅτι τέθνηκας.

(B) We might decide it is not Chrysippus and the Stoics who were guilty, but some interpreters of their συνάρτησις, old (Sextus) and new (including myself). If CT (and thus AT and BT) are incompatible with important Stoic evidence like that provided by the passages attesting our anti-sceptical dilemmas and the διὰ δύο τροπικῶν theorem, so much the worse for the hypothesis that those logical theses were Stoic. The problem remains how to reinterpret the evidence from Sextus, Cicero, Apollonius and Boethius⁶⁹ which I surveyed in chapter 6 of part 1; at the moment, I cannot see persuasive solutions on the horizon.

(C) A smoother and more interesting path to track is one allowing us to reconcile CT with the anti-sceptical dilemmas without excluding the Stoic origin of either. We have seen that the key conditional premisses of those dilemmas were justified, surprisingly, on the basis of an *ad hominem* περιτροπή apparently inadequate to that purpose. I have argued that this oddity is insufficient to persuade us to ditch our analysis of περιτροπή in favour of a different one on which περιτροπή might offer adequate grounds for those conditionals. I propose that we might try the other way round with better fortune, and revise our understanding of the anti-sceptical dilemmas following the clue that περιτροπή is supposed to be somehow relevant to their soundness. On this approach, those dilemmas could be interpreted as *elliptical* and *enthymematic* formulations of dialectical arguments perfectly compatible with CT, AT and BT:

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) $q \rightarrow p$ | If <you answer that> cause (sign, proof) exists, then <you yourself admit that> cause (sign, proof) exists |
| (2) $r \leftrightarrow s \wedge s \rightarrow p$ | If <you answer that> cause (sign, proof) does not exist, then <you must present a cause (sign, proof) of what you assert, in order to be credible, but thus you yourself admit that> cause (sign, proof) exists |
| (3) $q \vee r$ | Either <you answer that> cause (sign, proof) exists or <you answer that> cause (sign, proof) does not exist |
| <hr/> | |
| (4) p | In any case <you yourself admit that> cause (sign, proof) exists |

⁶⁹ And perhaps Galen (cf. p. 110n52).

Analogous considerations might solve the difficulties raised by the Stoic διὰ δύο τροπικῶν theorem; a careful reading of τ60 reveals the assumptions which remain in the background of the 'official' formulation of the argument but are used in the context of the justification of its premisses. Once these assumptions are made explicit, the incompatibility of the theorem with CT and BT immediately dissolves:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| (1) $(p \wedge r) \rightarrow q$ | If you know that you are dead <and everything one knows is true>, you are dead |
| (2) $(p \wedge s) \rightarrow \neg q$ | If you know that you are dead <and whoever is dead does not know anything>, you are not dead |
| <hr/> | |
| (3) $\neg p \vee \neg r \vee \neg s$ | You do not know that you are dead <or not everything one knows is true or some of the dead know something> |

It remains to be explained why on earth in these arguments essential elements were left unstated. The quest for argumentative elegance and economy might have been a factor: in Origen's διὰ δύο τροπικῶν the two assumptions omitted were probably considered so endoxical that making them explicit would have been superfluous and rejecting them unthinkable, while the anti-sceptical dilemmas might have been ways to summarise, in a pedagogically memorable way, more complex and discursive pieces of dialectical reasoning.⁷⁰

In the case of the anti-sceptical dilemmas, however, the omission would be logically less innocuous and dialectically less disinterested; bracketing the dialectical context might prevent the Sceptic from noticing that the antecedents of the two conditional premisses were not a genuine contradictory pair,⁷¹ and besides asserting that p and asserting that not- p there is a third possibility, suspending judgement on the truth of p , which is exactly the sceptical option. More importantly, the enthymematic formulation of

⁷⁰ As Schofield (1983: 53) suggests for Zeno's notorious 'philosophical syllogisms'.

⁷¹ We have seen that according to Sextus premiss (3) of the dilemmas is true because its disjuncts form a contradictory pair (n. 60 above). This justification, just as that of the truth of the first conditional premiss on the grounds that its clauses are identical, is incompatible with that dialectical context presupposed by the justification of the second premiss. On this reading, then, the anti-sceptical dilemmas look like strange 'hybrids' formed of ordinary assertoric premisses and disguised dialectical premisses.

the second conditional hides that dogmatic *petitio principii* for which if one wants to be credible in one's denial of the existence of causes, signs or proof one must agree to produce causes, signs or proof for this denial, thus incurring περιτροπή.

(D) So far I have tried to solve our puzzle by showing how the inconsistency might be, somehow, illusory. I shall propose now a different kind of solution, which renounces reconciling the alleged properties AT and CT of the Chrysippean conditional with the alleged soundness of our problematic λόγοι, but still evades the problem. Although the dilemmatic arguments reported by Sextus seem to have been, like the διὰ δύο τροπικῶν, Stoic, nothing forces us to believe that they were specifically *Chrysippean*. Although any attempt to trace refined doctrinal distinctions within the Stoic school is made extremely hard, if not impossible, by the scantiness and nature of the extant testimonies, such difficulties as ours must not lead us to postulate an easier, but inexact, picture of Stoic logic as an immutable and compact whole, without internal conflicts and developments. The tendency to conflate Chrysippean logic with Stoic logic *tout court* should be fought hard, and so much more so in our case, since there is an interesting piece of evidence which might be taken to bar Chrysippus' paternity of both the anti-sceptical dilemmas and the διὰ δύο τροπικῶν:

τ61 Now, it is possible to come across many who have accurate training in the ways the syllogisms through two or three complex premisses (τροπικά), those concluding not differently, and others similar, are reduced by using the first and the third *thema* . . . but this whole construction of such syllogisms is no small waste of time on useless matters, as testified in practice by Chrysippus himself, who nowhere in his works needed those syllogisms to prove a doctrine.⁷² (Gal. *Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 2.3.18–20)

On the basis of the meaning of διὰ δύο τροπικῶν in τ60, it is a probable conjecture that the anti-sceptical dilemmas were classified by the Stoics as arguments concluding 'through three τροπικά' (two conditionals and one disjunction).⁷³ But Galen informs us that Chrysippus never employed such

⁷² νυνὶ δὲ πῶς μὲν οἱ διὰ δύο ἢ τριῶν τροπικῶν ἀναλύονται συλλογισμοὶ καὶ πῶς οἱ ἀδιαφόρως περαίνοντες ἢ τινες ἄλλοι τοιοῦτοι τῷ πρώτῳ καὶ δευτέρῳ θέματι προσχρώμενοι, πολλοῖς ἐστὶ συντυχεῖν ἀκριβῶς ἡσκημένοις . . . καὶ περιεργίαν εἶναι οὐ μικρὰν ἀχρήστου πράγματος ἅπασαν τὴν τῶν τοιούτων συλλογισμῶν πλοκήν, ὥς αὐτὸς ὁ Χρύσιππος ἔργῳ μαρτυρεῖ μηδαμῶθι τῶν ἑαυτοῦ συγγραμμάτων εἰς ἀπόδειξιν δόγματος ἐκείνων δεηθεῖς τῶν συλλογισμῶν. I adopt the text with Ricci's emendation ἢ τριῶν (the MSS have τριῶν) like e.g. Frede 1974: 182.

⁷³ Cf. Frede 1974: 181–4.

arguments to prove his doctrines, thus if we can trust his word Origen's sole example of διὰ δύο τροπικῶν argument and Sextus' various dilemmas (διὰ τριῶν τροπικῶν) cannot be Chrysippean. One might protest that this is a quite big 'if' to swallow; in support of my hypothesis, however, it is reasonable to suppose that the dilemmas in defence of cause, sign and proof originated as a response to those who disputed the existence of cause, sign and proof, and it is likely that the attacks on those notions started with Carneades (second century BC), or even later with Aenesidemus (first century BC), and thus *after* Chrysippus (third century BC).⁷⁴ T61 is also compatible with the strongest conjecture that Chrysippus did not avail himself of those 'syllogisms through two or three complex premisses' because he did not believe them to be demonstrative, since he had recognised their invalidity (or degenerate validity) given his conception of conditional. Those syllogisms might have been introduced by *later Stoics*, urged by the necessity to devise new and stronger argumentative tools to face the more and more pressing attacks of Academics and Pyrrhonists: we know that Clitomachus, Carneades' pupil, wrote a *Refutations of Proof* (cf. Gal. *Libr. Propr.* 19.44, 7), that Aenesidemus opposed the aetiologists with his eight modes against causal explanation (cf. e.g. S.E. *PH* 1.180–6) and argued against the notion of sign (cf. Phot. *Bibl.* 212, 170b12–14) and that Agrippa devised a series of arguments against proof, sign and cause (cf. D.L. 9.90–1).⁷⁵

On this hypothesis, the inconsistency I have denounced would not be Chrysippus' fault: it might have been later Stoics who incautiously adopted dilemmatic arguments the truth of which was incompatible with συνάρτησις and its properties. But it is not obligatory (or, I think, plausible) to impute any blunder to these anonymous successors of Chrysippus either: while formulating their new arguments they might have adopted some compatible non-Chrysippean analysis of συνημμένον. Apparently, there was some debate within the Stoic school concerning the nature of συνημμένον;⁷⁶ although συνάρτησις represented Stoic orthodoxy for some time, it is easy to conjecture that some successors of Chrysippus might have

⁷⁴ Gourinat (2000: 248) suggests instead that the anti-sceptical dilemmas can be plausibly attributed to Zeno of Citium, but his arguments (they are Stoic but cannot be Chrysippean and resemble Zeno's dilemmatic argument T57 (p. 176) and Aristotle's φιλοσοφητέον argument of the *Protrepticus* (cf. chapter 11 below)) underdetermine this conclusion.

⁷⁵ On the possible influence of earlier Hellenistic medical schools on later sceptical arguments about causation cf. Barnes 1983: 150–3.

⁷⁶ As possibly suggested in S.E. *M* 8.428.

preferred to return to the Philonian or Diodorean conceptions,⁷⁷ or might have elaborated variants of συνάρτησις⁷⁸ (remember Sextus' attribution of the anti-sceptical dilemmas to 'some').⁷⁹ Alternatively, even while sticking to Chrysippean logical orthodoxy these Stoics could have used their new arguments as suggested at point (c) above, i.e. as abridged formulations of dialectical περιτροπή patterns fully acceptable in a logic in which conditional propositions are characterised by CT, and thus AT and BT.

It would be rash to subscribe with assurance to any of these proposals in the absence of stronger evidence. I find the very last hypothesis I have formulated, which combines a dialectical reinterpretation of the anti-sceptical dilemmas with plausible conjectures on historical development, especially appealing: it reconciles our textual evidence with my understanding of περιτροπή and συνάρτησις and my contention regarding the

⁷⁷ The adoption of Philo's truth-conditions by some Stoics emerges sometimes in our sources (cf. e.g. S.E. *PH* 2.104); the problem is to establish whether by pre- or post-Chrysippean Stoics, and how reliable these testimonies are.

⁷⁸ I have explored one such variant, suggested by some ancient testimonies, in Castagnoli 2009: 'A conditional "If *p*, then *q*" is true if and only if whenever one asserts that *p* is true one must assert that *q* is true because of one's asserting that *p* is true'. I cannot discuss here the details and the difficulties of this proposal, but on a generously flexible interpretation of these truth-conditions the περιτροπή of the assertion 'Cause (sign, proof) does not exist' in a dialectical context would guarantee the truth of the conditional 'If cause (sign, proof) does not exist, then cause (sign, proof) exists'. Note also that the Stoic concept of declarative proposition, the ἀξιωμα (assertible), is itself intrinsically connected to that of assertion (cf. S.E. *PH* 2.104), as Burnyeat emphasises (1976a: 54–5). Cf. Fair 2004 for interesting analysis of a puzzling Aristotelian passage (*APo.* 1.6, 75a18–27) in which the necessity of *saying* the conclusion for anyone who *says* the premisses of a syllogism is adopted in place of the necessity of the conclusion given the premisses as what guarantees the validity of syllogisms with contingent conclusions.

⁷⁹ The inconsistency would be eliminated by hypothesising a diachronic adoption of different conceptions of συνημμένον within the Stoic school. In a series of publications Nasti De Vincentis has defended instead the thesis of a *synchronic* adoption by Chrysippus himself of different analyses of the conditional (cf. in particular Nasti De Vincentis 1998, 1999 and 2002): Chrysippus' logic was not a logic of 'pure Chrysippean implication', but admitted at least two, and perhaps three, different notions of conditional proposition, one weak (Philonian), one strong (συνάρτησις), and perhaps one intermediate (Diodorean). Sextus' criticism of the dogmatic dilemma in defence of the existence of proof on the basis of CT (*PH* 2.188–92) would be based, according to Nasti De Vincentis, on an erroneous treatment of Chrysippus' logic as a logic of pure συνάρτησις: that dilemma is invalid if we interpret all the relevant conditionals as συναρτήσεις, but Chrysippus had in mind a Philonian conditional for the main conditionalisation (cf. Castagnoli 2004b and 2004c for discussion and criticism of Nasti De Vincentis's proposals).

On my current hypothesis, at *PH* 2.188–92 Sextus would not be bluffing by attributing to Chrysippus a conception of pure implication; he would be assessing the soundness of an argument introduced by Chrysippus' successors in light not of their conception of συνημμένον, but of that of their master. Sextus would be adopting a typical strategy of his, attacking a dogmatic position by setting it in opposition to another dogmatic position; the move would be particularly shrewd here, because he would be allying himself with some Stoics (Chrysippus) to fight and undermine other Stoics (some of his successors).

conspicuous absence of *Consequentia Mirabilis* and its relatives from our surviving testimonies on ancient logic.⁸⁰

But will my contention endure the formidable threat posed by contrasting evidence which appears to spring from the father of logic himself? To find out the answer, let us proceed to the next chapter.

⁸⁰ Partial corroboration of this hypothesis will come in part III (chapter 14, section 3) from my analysis of the broad context of Sextus' treatment of the dilemma in defence of proof in *Against the Logicians*.

CHAPTER II

Must we philosophise? Aristotle's protreptic argument

If you compose an invitation to philosophy and besides celebrating how easy, noble and happy a philosopher's life is you even manage to establish that, anyway, one *must* philosophise, no doubt you have earned a place in the sun in the history of protreptic literature. Young Aristotle's achievement in his *Protrepticus* did not escape notice in antiquity, and although the section including Aristotle's famed φιλοσοφητέον argument (i.e. 'the one must philosophise argument') is not among the fragments directly quoted by our main sources,¹ there are a number of late extant references to it dating from the second century AD. Let us take a look at all of them first:

t62 There are cases in which, whatever meaning one understands, one can, on the basis of it, refute the thesis proposed: for example, if someone said that we ought not to philosophise, since even to inquire (ζητεῖν) into this very thing, whether we ought to philosophise or not, is to philosophise (as he [*sc.* Aristotle] himself said in the *Protrepticus*), but also to pursue philosophical theorising <is to philosophise>, by showing that each of these two things is natural to man we will deny the thesis proposed on all counts.² (Alex. Aphr. in *Top.* 149, 9–15)

t63 And that famous argument appears to me sound: if one must philosophise, one must philosophise; for a thing follows itself; but even if one must not philosophise <one must philosophise>; for one could not despise something without first coming to know it; therefore one must philosophise.³ (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6.18.162)

¹ POxy 4.666, Stob. *Flor.* 3.3.25, Iamb. *Protr.* 65–90. For recent reconstruction of the *Protrepticus* and its content cf. Hutchinson and Johnson 2005.

² ἔστι δὲ ἐφ' ὧν καὶ πάντα τὰ σημαινόμενα λαμβάνοντας ἔστιν ἐπὶ πάντων αὐτῶν ἀνασκευάζειν τὸ κείμενον· οἷον εἰ λέγοι τις ὅτι μὴ χρὴ φιλοσοφεῖν, ἐπεὶ φιλοσοφεῖν λέγεται καὶ τὸ ζητεῖν αὐτὸ τοῦτο, εἴτε χρὴ φιλοσοφεῖν εἴτε καὶ μὴ, ὥς εἶπεν αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ Προτρεπτικῷ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ τὴν φιλόσοφον θεωρίαν μετιέναι, ἐκάτερον αὐτῶν δείξαντες οἰκεῖον τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ πανταχόθεν ἀναιρήσομεν τὸ τιθέμενον.

³ καὶ γὰρ οὖν εὖ πως ἔχειν μοι φαίνεται ὁ λόγος ἐκεῖνος· εἰ φιλοσοφητέον, φιλοσοφητέον· αὐτὸ γὰρ τι αὐτῷ ἀκολουθεῖ· ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ μὴ φιλοσοφητέον· οὐ γὰρ τις καταγνώη ἂν τινος μὴ τοῦτο πρότερον ἐγνωκώς· φιλοσοφητέον ἄρα.

τ64 In Cicero Hortensius, who contended against philosophy, got trapped through a clever (*arguta*) argument,⁴ since when saying that one must not philosophise he appeared to be philosophising all the same, because it is proper of the philosopher to discuss (*disputare*) what must or must not be done in life.⁵ (Lact. *Div. Inst.* 3.16.9)⁶

τ65 [The syllogism] is 'subconditional' (παρασυνημένος) when both the hypothesis and the minor premiss contain the members of a contradiction and conclude one single thing . . . Of this kind is also Aristotle's argument in the *Protrepticus*: 'Whether one must philosophise or one must not philosophise, one must philosophise; but either one must philosophise or one must not philosophise; therefore in any case one must philosophise'.⁷ (schol. in *Ammon.* in *APr.* 11, 13–21)⁸

τ66 And Aristotle in the *Protrepticus* said that both if one must philosophise one must philosophise and if one must not philosophise one must philosophise; then in any case one must philosophise.⁹ (Olymp. in *Alcib.* 144, 15–17)

τ67 Also those who deny it [*sc.* philosophy] involuntarily concede its existence (καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἀναίρουντες αὐτὴν ἄκοντες δεδῶκασιν τὸ εἶναι αὐτήν) (for wishing to prove that it does not exist they introduce it; for proof is a part of philosophy) . . . Or also <we may say> as Aristotle says in the work *Protrepticus*, in which he exhorts the youth to philosophy. For he says this: 'If we must philosophise, we must philosophise; and if we must not philosophise we must philosophise; therefore in any case we must philosophise.' For if <philosophy> exists, absolutely we must philosophise because it exists; and if it does not exist, even so we must inquire why philosophy does not exist; and in inquiring we will be philosophising, since inquiring is the principle of philosophy.¹⁰ (Elias in *Porph. Isag.* 3, 12–23)

⁴ *Conclusio* is frequently used by Cicero in the sense of 'deductive argument', 'inference', and not, narrowly, 'conclusion' of an argument.

⁵ Ciceronis Hortensius contra philosophiam disserens circumvenitur arguta conclusione, quod cum diceret philosophandum non esse, nihilominus philosophari videbatur, quoniam philosophi est, quid in vita faciendum, vel non faciendum sit, disputare.

⁶ This passage is usually listed among the *testimonia* on the *Protrepticus* because Cicero is reported to have modelled his *Hortensius* on Aristotle's work (cf. *Historia Augusta* 2.97, 20–2). For a different view cf. Rabinowitz 1957.

⁷ παρασυνημένος ἐστίν, ὅτε καὶ ἡ ὑπόθεσις καὶ ἡ πρόσληψις ἀντιφατικαὶ οὖσαι εἰς ἓν τελευτῶσιν . . . τοιοῦτος δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἀριστοτέλους λόγος ἐν τῷ Προτρεπτικῷ· εἴτε φιλοσοφητέον εἴτε φιλοσοφῆτέον· πάντως δὲ φιλοσοφῆτέον. ἀλλὰ μὴν ἡ φιλοσοφῆτέον ἡ οὐ φιλοσοφῆτέον· πάντως ἄρα φιλοσοφῆτέον.

⁸ This scholium, entitled 'On all the forms of syllogism' (περὶ τῶν εἰδῶν πάντων τοῦ συλλογισμοῦ), follows the *subscriptio* of the codex *Parisinus Graecus* 2064 and was probably written in the sixth century AD on the basis of an earlier source (it was printed by Wallies in the *praefatio* to his edition of Ammonius' commentary on the first book of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*).

⁹ καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης μὲν ἐν τῷ Προτρεπτικῷ ἔλεγεν ὅτι εἴτε φιλοσοφῆτέον, φιλοσοφῆτέον· εἴτε μὴ φιλοσοφῆτέον, φιλοσοφῆτέον· πάντως δὲ φιλοσοφῆτέον.

¹⁰ καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἀναίρουντες αὐτὴν ἄκοντες δεδῶκασιν τὸ εἶναι αὐτήν (ἀποδείξαι γὰρ βουλόμενοι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν εἰσάγουσιν αὐτήν· ἡ γὰρ ἀπόδειξις μέρος φιλοσοφίας) . . . ἡ καὶ ὡς φησιν

τ68 Aristotle too in a certain work of his, *Protrepticus*, in which he exhorts the youth to philosophy, says that both if one must philosophise one must philosophise and if one must not philosophise one must philosophise; then in any case one must philosophise. That is, if one says that philosophy does not exist, one has got proofs through which one denies philosophy; but if one has got proofs, it is clear that one is philosophising (for philosophy is the mother of proofs). And if one says that philosophy exists, again one is philosophising; for one has got proofs through which one proves that it exists. In any case then both he who denies it [*sc.* philosophy] and he who does not philosophise; for each of them has got proofs through which he confirms what he says; but if he has got proofs, it is clear that he is philosophising; for philosophy is the mother of proofs.¹¹ (David *Prol. Phil.* 9, 2–12)

According to William Kneale (1957: 63), this rich textual evidence¹² shows that with Aristotle's *Protrepticus* the pattern of argument which would become popular much later under the name of *Consequentia Mirabilis* made its first appearance in philosophical literature, since the dilemmatic schema attested by our sources

- | | | |
|-------|------------------------|---|
| (1) | $p \rightarrow p$ | If one must philosophise, one must philosophise |
| (2) | $\neg p \rightarrow p$ | If one must not philosophise, one must philosophise |
| <hr/> | | |
| (3) | p | In any case, therefore, one must philosophise |

can be reduced to CM by dropping the logical truism (1). Kneale adds that the unreduced schema, with the addition of the further truistic disjunctive premiss $p \vee \neg p$, 'was used by Stoic logicians' (63), clearly referring to the inferential pattern of the anti-sceptical dilemmas analysed in chapter 10.¹³

Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τῷ Προτρεπτικῷ ἐπιγεγραμμένῳ, ἐν ᾧ προτρέπει τοὺς νέους πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν· φησὶ γὰρ οὕτως· εἰ μὲν φιλοσοφῆτέον, φιλοσοφῆτέον, καὶ εἰ μὴ φιλοσοφῆτέον, φιλοσοφῆτέον· πάντως ἄρα φιλοσοφῆτέον· εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἔστι, πάντως ὀφείλομεν φιλοσοφεῖν οὕσης αὐτῆς, εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστι, καὶ οὕτως ὀφείλομεν ζητεῖν πῶς οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ φιλοσοφία· ζητοῦντες δὲ φιλοσοφοῦμεν, ἔπειδὴ τὸ ζητεῖν αἰτία τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἐστί.

¹¹ καὶ ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ ἐν τῷ Προτρεπτικῷ αὐτοῦ συγγράμματι, ἐν ᾧ προτρέπεται τοὺς νέους ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν, λέγει ὅτι εἴτε μὴ φιλοσοφῆτέον, φιλοσοφῆτέον, εἴτε φιλοσοφῆτέον, φιλοσοφῆτέον· πάντως δὲ φιλοσοφῆτέον. τοῦτ' ἔστιν εἴτε λέγει τις μὴ εἶναι φιλοσοφίαν, ἀποδείξει κέχρηται, δι' ὧν ἀναιρεῖ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν· εἰ δὲ ἀποδείξει κέχρηται, δῆλον ὅτι φιλοσοφεῖ (μήτηρ γὰρ τῶν ἀποδείξεων ἡ φιλοσοφία)· εἴτε λέγει εἶναι φιλοσοφίαν, πάλιν φιλοσοφεῖ· ἀποδείξει γὰρ κέχρηται, δι' ὧν δεικνυσιν οὖσαν αὐτήν. πάντως οὖν φιλοσοφεῖ καὶ ὁ ἀναιρῶν αὐτήν καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀναιρῶν· ἐκάτερος γὰρ αὐτῶν ἀποδείξει κέχρηται, δι' ὧν πιστοῦται τὰ λεγόμενα· εἰ δὲ ἀποδείξει κέχρηται, δῆλον ὅτι φιλοσοφεῖ· μήτηρ γὰρ τῶν ἀποδείξεων ἡ φιλοσοφία.

¹² Cf. also Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 5.10.70.

¹³ Kneale fails to notice that in one of our testimonies, τ65, the disjunctive premiss is present. Moreover, in τ65 the two conditional premisses are fused into one: 'whether p or not- p , p ' (this might be the reason why the disjunctive premiss is introduced explicitly; for the ancient aversion towards single-premiss arguments cf. p. 104). The particular logical form of τ65's version is clearly dictated by the agenda of our source (cf. p. 191).

It comes as no surprise, then, that the φιλοσοφητέον argument as reconstructed by Kneale faces the same battery of questions and difficulties which I have outlined with regard to those dilemmas.

The first one concerns the rationale for its key premiss (2): to borrow Nuchelmans' lucid analysis,

in the form in which it is presented it certainly is not true: the bare proposition that one must not philosophize does not imply the proposition that one must philosophize. Things are different, however, if the propositional content that one must not philosophize is made the object of an activity that itself counts as an instance of philosophizing. (1991: 14)¹⁴

Indeed some such sort of activity is what is explicitly mentioned by our sources when justifying the conditional (2) 'If one must not philosophize, one must philosophize': inquiring whether one should philosophize or not (T62), trying to prove one's stance towards philosophy (T67, T68), discussing what one ought to do in life (T64), attempting to know what philosophy is (T63). Once again, the reasons we are given for accepting the kernel of the dilemmatic argument (2) appear to be irrelevant if we take that conditional literally and the whole argument as an expanded version of CM.

The second puzzle involves the very possibility of any argument in the pattern of the φιλοσοφητέον argument. As we have seen in part 1 (chapter 6, section 1), in his *Prior Analytics* Aristotle appears to endorse two theses, AT and BT, which if true would make any such argument unsound: premiss (2) is a denial of AT, and (1) and (2) are jointly incompatible with BT. To voice Kneale's qualms, 'did Aristotle ever consider in abstraction the pattern of inference which he had used in his *Protrepticus*? And did he realise when he wrote his *Prior Analytics* that 57a36–b17 [cf. T24 on p. 106] involved rejection of that pattern?'¹⁵ Kneale's impression is that he did, but this was not enough to save him from his historic error in the *Analytics*, presumably due to an ill-advised change of mind.

Suddenly it looks as if young Aristotle's pithy achievement has turned out to be a fatal philosophical rout, a dreadful mix of falsehood, irrelevance and inconsistency. Can we assist him? I think we can and should. To begin with, we must reject a tacit assumption which Kneale shares with many other

¹⁴ Cf. also Kneale 1957: 63: 'Anyone who ... says οὐ φιλοσοφητέον lays himself open to a charge of inconsistency, since he has already begun to philosophize in enunciating his principle; but we are not entitled on that account to say εἰ μὴ φιλοσοφητέον, φιλοσοφητέον.'

¹⁵ Kneale 1957: 66 (slightly adapted).

interpreters, both earlier¹⁶ and later,¹⁷ and which was first convincingly criticised by Rabinowitz.¹⁸ It is true that the majority of our sources attribute to Aristotle a dilemmatic argument with two conditional premisses easily reducible to CM; however, the two sources who are closest to Aristotle, in time (Cicero *apud* Lactantius) and in 'spirit' (Alexander of Aphrodisias), do not present any argument of that form. This silence alone is insufficient to establish that no such argument existed in the *Protrepticus*,¹⁹ but certainly casts shadows on the reliability of the specific wording of other testimonies, particularly given the non-Aristotelian 'flavour' of propositional logic of their later versions.²⁰ It is not wild speculation to suppose that our later sources might have preserved a 'Stoicising' recasting of Aristotle's argument, whatever its exact formulation might have been:²¹ this is even more plausible when one realises that actually even among them there is no complete consensus on the exact logical form of the argument (cf. n. 13 above). We find an instructive example of the phenomenon I am suggesting in what immediately follows T65:

T69 Of this kind [*sc.* subconditional syllogism] is also Plato's argument in the *Protagoras*: 'Whether Protagoras speaks truly or speaks falsely, he speaks falsely; but either he speaks truly or he speaks falsely; in any case therefore he speaks falsely.'²² (schol. in *Ammon. in APr.* 11, 21–3)

Not only would you remain disappointed if you browsed the *Protagoras* in search of this argument; you will not succeed even if, more shrewdly, you peruse the *Theaetetus*, since nowhere will you find Socrates arguing against Protagoras in this precise form. Our scholiast and his source are clearly *reshaping* Plato's own words in the *Theaetetus*²³ into that particular logical

¹⁶ E.g. Bywater, Hirzel, Diels, Jaeger, Bignone (for detailed references cf. Chroust 1973: vol. II, 338n57, Bellissima and Pagli 1996: 186n18).

¹⁷ E.g. Wilpert 1960: 106, Bellissima and Pagli 1996: 182.

¹⁸ Cf. Rabinowitz 1957: 35–41. Cf. also Düring 1961: 36, Chroust 1964: 48–9.

¹⁹ Pace Düring 1961: 36.

²⁰ Pace Schneeweiß (2005: 90–3), who includes in his reconstruction of the original *Protrepticus* both the precise words attributed to Aristotle by the scholiast in T65 and those attributed to him by Elias in T67. This is not to deny that we can find fragments of propositional logic in Aristotle's logic of terms.

²¹ We should not even be too confident that the verbal adjective φιλοσοφητέον featured in Aristotle's argument: Alexander has χρη φιλοσοφεῖν and the occurrences of the term φιλοσοφητέον which can be attributed with some certainty to Aristotle himself, and not to our sources, are very few (possibly only one at POxy 4.666.3, 55–6).

²² τοιοῦτος καὶ ὁ Πλάτωνος ἐν τῷ Προταγόρᾳ λόγος: εἴτε ἀληθεύει Προταγόρας εἴτε ψεύδεται, ψεύδεται· ἀλλὰ μὴν ἢ ἀληθεύει ἢ ψεύδεται· πάντως ἄρα ψεύδεται.

²³ The passage referred to is most probably *Th.* 170c2–d3 (T7 on p. 45).

pattern (the παρασυντημμένος syllogism)²⁴ in which they are currently interested; why should not they be doing the same with Aristotle in τ65?²⁵

If this is correct, all the problems I have raised concerning the formal dilemma attested by the majority of our sources immediately dissolve. But can we reconstruct the original *Protrepticus* argument? The two sources which I have singled out as arguably more reliable offer similar clues, but slightly different formulations. From Alexander we gather that according to Aristotle to inquire (ζητεῖν) whether one ought to philosophise or not is already to do philosophy,²⁶ from Lactantius the more general point that to discuss (*disputare*) what must and must not be done in life is itself to do philosophy. Lactantius also clarifies that it is for this reason that one who contends against philosophy (which includes, but presumably does not coincide with, saying in the face of opposition that one must not philosophise) falls into a trap, and does so through an argument which he judges 'clever'. It is not difficult to supply the missing link: to inquire about some issue and to discuss it are intrinsically philosophical activities, because they involve the appeal to reasons and proofs in defence of one's view and against the opposite one. This is in fact the way the dilemmatic argument is expanded and justified by Elias and David in τ67 and τ68: inquiry is the principle of philosophy and is committed to the use of proofs, and philosophy is the 'mother of proof'. I have expressed reservations on the reliability of the reports of these sixth-century AD Neoplatonists as far as the precise logical form of Aristotle's original argument is concerned, and I am not suggesting now that they must be trusted verbatim on the explanation of its thrust (after all, their accounts differ slightly).²⁷ However, their testimonies corroborate Alexander's and Lactantius' shorter reports, and thus help us to get a firmer understanding of the probable outline of Aristotle's own original argument. I suggest that argument might have

²⁴ Παρασυντημμένος is a technical term in Stoic logic, but it indicates a kind of ἀξιωμα ('assertible') and not a kind of argument: a true παρασυντημμένος has the form 'Since (ἐπει) *p*, *q*', where *q* follows from *p* and *p* is true (cf. D.L. 7.71). The examples collected by the scholiast belong to the whole ancient philosophical and rhetorical tradition, and are not specifically Stoic.

²⁵ Cf. Rabinowitz 1957: 39.

²⁶ The parenthesis 'as he [sc. Aristotle] himself said in the *Protrepticus*' refers only to 'even to inquire into this very thing, whether we ought to philosophise or not, is to philosophise'. Düring's remark that 'what Alexander says implies that something was said in the *Protrepticus* concerning the question "must one, or should one, philosophize", and nothing more' (1961: 36), is exceedingly deflationary.

²⁷ Both of them slide from 'one must not philosophise' in the dilemma to 'philosophy does not exist' in their justification (γάρ) and explanation (τοῦτ' ἔστιν) of it. Once again, this seems to be determined by their own personal agendas: Elias for example is interested in answering one by one, concerning philosophy, the four standard questions (προβλήματα) 'Does it exist?' (εἰ ἔστι), 'What is it?' (τί ἐστι), 'What is it like?' (ὁποῖόν τί ἐστι) and 'Why does it exist?' (διὰ τί ἔστι) (cf. *in Porph. Isag.* 3, 5–6).

sounded like this: 'If your position is that one must philosophise, you are definitely on my side of the barricade, and safe from the snares of Isocrates' shallow rhetoric; if you contend, on the contrary, that one must not philosophise, you ought to vindicate this crucial choice of lifestyle, in front of me and yourself, by offering reasons for it; but don't you realise that choosing what to do (and then defending your choices) on the basis of reflection and argument, and not, say, by ballot, is already doing philosophy, and thus you have already jumped over the fence to my side?'²⁸ In any case, therefore, whether you want this or not, you are bound to agree that one must philosophise.²⁹

(a) $q \rightarrow p$	If <your position is that> one must philosophise, then <you yourself admit that> one must philosophise
(b) $r \leftrightarrow s \wedge s \rightarrow p$	If <your position is that> one must not philosophise, then <you must reflect on this choice and argue in its support, but by doing so you are already choosing to do philosophy, thereby admitting that> one must philosophise
(c) $q \vee r$	Either <your position is that> one must philosophise or <your position is that> one must not philosophise
(d) p	In any case, therefore, <you must admit that> one must philosophise

An argument along these general lines does not depend on the unintelligible (and not so *mirabilis*) point that the necessity of philosophising is, mysteriously, a logical consequence of the necessity of not philosophising: it is not, therefore, as we had suspected, a genuine instance of CM.³⁰ It would seem, then, that the later commentators did not serve Aristotle well by stripping his argument of its original dialectical clothing (cf. pp. 31–2). Importing and adjusting a hypothesis I have formulated for the anti-sceptical dilemmas in the previous chapter, however, we can suppose

²⁸ To put it differently, philosophy must be *used* even by those who want to deny its usefulness (cf. p. 345n123).

²⁹ τ68 suggests that, in the case of someone who already believes that one must philosophise, having to give reasons for his position will confirm and strengthen it.

³⁰ Cf. Kneale 1957: 63: 'The most we can properly assert is "If *anyone* says there should be no philosophising, then there must inevitably be some philosophising, namely, that which he has just begun", and this is not in the form of a premiss for the *consequentia mirabilis*.'

that even those who later reshaped and simplified the form of the *Protrepticus* argument remained fully conscious of its actual logic, and used that dilemma as an elegant *elliptical reminder* of Aristotle's more complex and informal dialectical reasoning. In fact, we should not exclude the possibility that their inspiration could have come from the Stoic anti-sceptical dilemmas, from some analogously compressed phrasing devised by Aristotle himself to imprint his insight upon his readers' memories, or from both. This hypothesis bears a threefold dividend: no inconsistency with AT would arise, the key premiss (2) would no longer be obviously false, and Elias's and David's justification and paraphrase of the argument would escape an otherwise easy charge of sheer irrelevance. In turn, the fecundity of this hypothesis in the Aristotelian setting might represent further indirect support for its parallel application to the exegesis of the anti-sceptical dilemmas, closing a circle which need not be vicious.

Even if not by CM, was Aristotle's argument a proper proof, by self-refutation of the contradictory, of the necessity of doing philosophy? Throughout this book I have emphasised the idea that ancient reversal strategies did not aim at offering positive proof of the absolute truth of certain propositions; what they did, and often effectively, was to show that one could not consistently endorse and successfully defend such propositions in debate. In the present case the diagnosis is more difficult, since we are not informed about the fine details of Aristotle's own formulation. To allow some space for speculation, if his point was only that whenever one rationally adopts, justifies and defends the option not to philosophise, either against a flesh-and-blood dialectical opponent or, Platonically, in a silent dialogue with oneself (a sort of 'monologic dialectic'),³¹ one is thereby unconsciously and unwittingly admitting the necessity of philosophy, the 'mother of proofs', this does not amount to proof of the absolute truth of the maxim 'one must philosophise', but is another instance of the now familiar *ad hominem* reversal. If he added, either implicitly or explicitly, the extra assumption that any decision on what to do, or at least any decision of crucial significance for one's life, *ought* to be accompanied by that kind of reasoned assessment of its merits and drawbacks, then the absolute necessity of philosophy was proved³² (my attempted reconstruction was deliberately non-committal with respect to these exegetical options).³³ Against this way

³¹ Cf. T139 on p. 358.

³² It is difficult to decide what kind of necessity (psychological, moral, logical...) could have been established.

³³ Either way, I do not agree with Nuchelmans that Aristotle's argument is centred on a charge of pragmatic self-refutation (1991: 14), at least if pragmatic self-refutation is intended in the strict sense identified in chapter 10.

of strengthening the argument one might object, first of all, that such an extra assumption alone would already imply, in rather question-begging fashion, the necessity of philosophising (by excluding other possible sources of motivation, like habit, authority, emotional drive), and second that the whole argument is open to the retort that one can carefully decide with the aid of argument and philosophy that one ought not to philosophise and *then* abandon philosophy altogether.³⁴ To borrow a metaphor used by later Pyrrhonists, the (intrinsically philosophical) arguments against philosophy might be like purgative drugs which eliminate both the pretensions of philosophy and themselves.³⁵

Aristotle's *Protrepticus* was extremely influential in the history of Greek thought, and through Cicero's once renowned *Hortensius* at least some of its arguments and ideas found a wide audience in the Latin world too.³⁶ Although no hard evidence can substantiate this conjecture, it would not be surprising if the argumentative pattern of the φιλοσοφητέον argument, whatever it might have been exactly, inspired the Hellenistic περιτροπή arguments against the deniers of the existence of cause, sign and proof which we have analysed in the previous chapter.³⁷ If so, it would be even

³⁴ Cf. Rohatyn 1977: 197.

³⁵ Cf. part III, chapter 14, section 3 and chapter 15, section 2. However, one might reply that we would still need philosophy to confirm our choice and be ready to defend it against criticism at later times (for a similar line of reasoning against the Pyrrhonists cf. T135 on pp. 337–8).

³⁶ It was reading Cicero's *Hortensius* that turned the eighteen-year-old Augustine to the love for philosophy (cf. *Conf.* 3.4, 8.7). Probably the *Hortensius* was also a main source of inspiration for Boethius' *Consolatio*.

³⁷ It is evident that Aristotle's φιλοσοφητέον argument inspired this other περιτροπή argument in Sextus Empiricus' *Against the Grammarians*:

οὐκοῦν τῶν χρησιμωτάτων ἡ γραμματιστική. ἀμέλει γοῦν οὐδὲ θελήσαντες δυνησόμεθα ταύτην ἀπεριτρέπτως ἀνελεῖν· εἰ γὰρ αἱ ἄχρηστον διδάσκουσιν τὴν γραμματιστικὴν ἐπιχειρήσεις εἰσὶν εὐχρηστοί, οὔτε δὲ μνημονευθῆναι οὔτε τοῖς αὐθις παραδοθῆναι χωρὶς αὐτῆς δύνανται, χρειώδης ἐστὶν ἡ γραμματιστική. (M 1.53)

Thus grammatic is among the most useful things. Anyway, even if we wanted to, we could not eliminate it without incurring reversal (ἀπεριτρέπτως): for if the arguments which teach that grammatic is useless are useful, but they can neither be recalled nor be transmitted to those who will come after us without it, then grammatic is needful.

'Grammatic' (γραμματιστική), i.e. the basic expertise of reading and writing (as opposed to 'grammatic' (γραμματική), the technical expertise of grammar, exegesis and literary criticism) is useful, and indeed necessary, to preserve and transmit any argument, including those against the usefulness of grammatic; therefore, to argue against the usefulness of grammatic is self-refuting, because those arguments can have some enduring effect only thanks to grammatic, which will thus be needed even by those who deny the usefulness of grammatic (just as philosophy is needed even by those who deny the necessity of doing philosophy). Notice that Sextus' argument assumes that the denier of grammatic will have to recur to writing to transmit his views and arguments (especially to posterity), but this assumption seems to be unwarranted (although some separate case could be made for the idea that writing will be the most effective way to preserve and disseminate the

easier to understand why certain formal schemas, most probably non-Aristotelian, were projected back on to Aristotle's seminal argument by some sources unconcerned with historical and philological accuracy.

Another strong echo of Aristotle's strategy (and confirmation of its dialectical nature) resonates in the short section of Epictetus' *Discourses* entitled 'How is logic necessary?':

170 When someone among those present said 'Convince me that logic is useful', he [*sc.* Epictetus] said 'Do you want me to prove this to you?' 'Yes.' 'Then must I use a demonstrative argument?' And when [the person in the audience] agreed, [Epictetus asked]: 'How then will you know if I deceive you sophistically?' When the man remained silent, he said 'Do you see how you yourself admit that this [*sc.* logic] is necessary, if without it you cannot even come to know this very thing, whether it is necessary or not?'³⁸ (*Disc.* 2.25)

Substitute 'one must philosophise' for 'logic is necessary' (or 'logic is useful') – a painless substitution, given the tight links we have found in Aristotle's protreptic tradition connecting philosophy, dialectic and proof – and you get an interesting variant of Aristotle's lesson: even if the burden of proof were not on you, and thus you did not need logic to argue for its uselessness, certainly you would still need it to assess (and, if necessary, unmask the fallacies of) the arguments of others who try to persuade you that logic is useful.³⁹

useful arguments against the usefulness of grammatistic, and thus the proponent of those arguments will certainly want to use it). For Sextus' distinction between 'grammatistic' and 'grammatic' cf. S.E. *M* 1.41–96 and Blank's commentary (1998: 108–49).

³⁸ τῶν παρόντων δὲ τινος εἰπόντος πείσόν με, ὅτι τὰ λογικὰ χρήσιμά ἐστιν, θέλεις, ἔφη, ἀποδείξω σοι τοῦτο; ναί. οὐκοῦν λόγον μὲ ἀποδεικτικὸν διαλεχθῆναι δεῖ; ὁμολογήσαντος δὲ πόθεν οὖν εἴσῃ, ἂν σε σοφίσωμαι; σιωπήσαντος δὲ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὀρᾷς, ἔφη, πῶς αὐτὸς ὁμολογεῖς ὅτι ταῦτα ἀναγκαῖά ἐστιν, εἰ χωρὶς αὐτῶν οὐδ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο δύνασαι μαθεῖν, πότερον ἀναγκαῖα ἢ οὐκ ἀναγκαῖά ἐστιν.

³⁹ Barnes (1997b: 59–60) attempts to reconstruct Epictetus' argument as a non-dialectical proof of the necessity of studying logic:

In order to know whether or not it is necessary to study logic,
it is necessary to study logic

But you ought to know whether or not it is necessary to study logic

Therefore: you ought to study logic

Barnes' second premiss fails to reflect 170's dialectical context, and for this reason is difficult to accept: it is no surprise, then, that Barnes is forced to conclude that, although 'it is a nice question . . . whether such a form is valid or not', at face value the argument 'reads, no doubt, like a sophism'. For the point that logic is useful and necessary to unmask sophistic arguments cf. also Epict. *Disc.* 1.7.

CHAPTER 12

Augustine's Si fallor, sum: how to prove one's existence by Consequentia Mirabilis

The scholarly myth of Augustine's lack of philosophical talent and originality has been ditched and buried for some time now, and most happily so. I suppose it was partly as a result of that poisoning prejudice that for a long time Augustine's argument usually epitomised as *Si fallor, sum* ('If I am mistaken, I am') has been treated with some superficiality, as an interesting but somehow immature and deficient anticipation of, and possibly inspiration for, Descartes' more renowned and momentous *Cogito*. At most, timid attempts were made to compare Augustine's argument with Descartes', but in the absence of a serious preliminary analysis of the logic of both the results were less than memorable.¹

Things have changed since Matthews, in a ground-breaking paper published in 1972, first focused on Augustine's argument for its own sake. In my account I shall often refer to Matthews's analysis, because of its exemplary rigour and especially because, while never using the label 'self-refutation', it construes Augustine's argument with traits startlingly resembling those with which I have been drawing my outline of the defining features of ancient self-refutation. As in chapter 7 of part 1, however, I shall argue that actually Augustine's strategy and aim differ here, in important respects, from those distinctive of ancient self-refutation.

Although Augustine himself did not use the vocabulary of self-refutation with reference to his *Si fallor, sum*, when reading the relevant texts one feels it was not out of place to do so on some commentators' part:²

171 Then first I ask you, to start with the things most evident, whether you yourself exist. Or perhaps you fear that concerning this question you are

¹ Hintikka 1962a is an exception, but it is mostly focused on Descartes' *Cogito*. The similarity between Augustine's and Descartes' arguments was first signalled to Descartes by Mersenne and Arnauld, but neither they nor Descartes himself produced any in-depth analysis of the analogies and differences.

² Cf. e.g. Rist 1994: 65; Harrison 1999: 201. Descartes' *Cogito*, which is supposedly similar, is also often referred to as a typical instance of self-refutation argument ('absolute' according to Passmore 1961: 60–1 (cf. p. 205n3), operational according to Mackie 1964: 197–8).

mistaken, when if you did not exist at all, by no means you could be mistaken? ... Therefore, since it is evident that you exist ...³ (*Lib. Arb.* 2.3.7)

T72 But without any teasing imagination of appearances or illusions, it is most certain to me that I am and that I know and I love this. Concerning these truths I do not fear any argument of the Academics who say: 'What if you are mistaken?' For if I am mistaken, I am (*Si enim fallor, sum*). For one who does not exist, by no means can be mistaken either; and for this reason I am, if I am mistaken. Because then I am if I am mistaken, how am I mistaken about my existence, when it is certain that I am, if I am mistaken? Since therefore I, who would be mistaken, would exist, even if I would be mistaken, without doubt I am not mistaken in this, that I know that I am.⁴ (*Civ. Dei* 11.26)

T73 So if we exclude the things which reach the soul having been perceived by the body, how many things remain that we know in the same way as we know that we are alive? In this we do not fear at all that because of some resemblance of truth perhaps we are mistaken, because it is certain that also he who is mistaken is alive ... It is an inner knowledge that by which we know we are alive.⁵ (*Trin.* 15.12.21)

If these passages⁶ really contain a self-refutation argument, we need to identify what refutes itself and, connectedly, what the conclusion of the argument is supposed to be. One might be tempted to presume, quite simply, that what is concluded is the speaker's existence (*sum*), and that this conclusion is somehow inferred from the premiss that he is mistaken (*fallor*), as the catchphrase *Si fallor, sum* suggests. This temptation, excited by the seeming parallelism with Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am'), ought to be resisted with resolve; since the hypothetical mistake at issue in all these passages is erroneously thinking that one

³ Quare prius abs te quaero, ut de manifestissimis capiamus exordium, utrum tu ipse sis. An tu fortasse metuis, ne in hac interrogatione fallaris, cum utique si non esses, falli omnino non posses? ... Ergo quoniam manifestum est esse te. ...

⁴ Sed sine ulla phantasiarum vel phantasmatum imaginatione ludificatoria mihi esse me idque nosse et amare certissimum est. Nulla in his veris Academicorum argumenta formido dicentium: Quid si falleris? Si enim fallor, sum. Nam qui non est, utique nec falli potest; ac per hoc sum, si fallor. Quia ergo sum si fallor, quomodo esse me fallor, quando certum est me esse, si fallor? Quia igitur essem qui fallerer, etiamsi fallerer, procul dubio in eo, quod me novi esse, non fallor.

⁵ His ergo exceptis quae a corporis sensibus in animum veniunt, quantum rerum remanet quod ita sciamus, sicut nos vivere scimus? In quo prorsus non metuimus, ne aliqua verisimilitudine forte fallamur, quoniam certum est etiam cum qui fallitur vivere. ... Intima scientia est qua nos vivere scimus.

⁶ I have listed these three passages in their likely chronological order: *De Libero Arbitrio* 2 (c. 389 AD), *De Civitate Dei* 11 (c. 417 AD), *De Trinitate* 15 (after 420 AD). Other passages often mentioned in discussions of Augustine's *Si fallor, sum* are *Trin.* 10.10.14 (T74 on p. 202), *Ver. Relig.* 39.73 (cf. n. 7 on p. 123), *Vit. Beat.* 2.7 and *Sol.* 2.1.1. I shall not discuss the last two passages because they merely state the general idea that we know with full certainty that we exist and are alive.

exists, as the context makes abundantly clear, one could never use *fallor* as the true premiss of a *modus ponens* argument intended to establish one's existence (*Si fallor, sum; fallor; ergo sum*).⁷ On the basis of this indisputable point, Matthews concludes that Augustine's project was not, after all, to reason constructively for an elementary truth such as 'I exist', but only to argue destructively against sceptical doubt or, as Matthews puts it, *contra academicos*.⁸ T72, with its richer exposition, is illuminating for this perspective. Augustine claims to be certain of his existence, despite the Sceptic's urging: 'What if you are mistaken?'⁹ Augustine explains why he does not fear such a taunt, and *Si fallor, sum* is the heart of his rebuff to the Sceptic's question. This is how, according to Matthews (1972: 162), in T72 Augustine proves that the possibility the Sceptic conjures up is no possibility at all:

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| (M1) If I am mistaken in thinking that I am, I am not | For the meaning of 'to be mistaken': if I am mistaken in thinking that <i>p</i> , then not- <i>p</i> |
| (M2) If I am mistaken in thinking that I am, I am | Because to do anything, including being mistaken, I must exist |
| (M3) If I am mistaken in thinking that I am, both I am and I am not | From (M1) and (M2) |
| (M4) Therefore, it cannot be that I am mistaken in thinking that I am. | From (M3), <i>reductio ad absurdum</i> |

Matthews, who is admirably attentive, in the first part of his paper, to discarding possible interpretations of the logic of T72 fitting poorly Augustine's actual phrasing, falls short of his own desiderata here: nowhere in the texts I have quoted is premiss (M1) formulated, nor does Augustine suggest that his conclusion is reached through an argument in the form of *reductio ad absurdum*.¹⁰

⁷ Cf. Matthews 1972: 162–3.

⁸ Cf. also Abercrombie (1938: 64), according to whom in T72 the *Si fallor, sum* 'appears most clearly in its true colours as an *argumentum ad hominem* and nothing more'.

⁹ As Rist (1994: 65) suggests, 'in *The Trinity* ... the kinds of mistakes the Academic has in mind are spelled out: perhaps you are dreaming? Or insane?' (cf. *Trin.* 15.12.21).

¹⁰ On this reconstruction, the structure of Augustine's argument would resemble that of the Stoic διὰ δὲ τοῦ τροπικῶν of T60 on p. 180 (cf. chapter 10).

Let us attempt a reconstruction more closely adhering to Augustine's formulation in T72:¹¹

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| (1) If I am mistaken in thinking that I am, I am ¹² | If something does not exist, it cannot do anything, including be mistaken ¹³ |
| (2) If I am, I am not mistaken in thinking that I am ¹⁴ | For the meaning of 'to be mistaken': if <i>p</i> , I am not mistaken in thinking that <i>p</i> |
-
- (3) Therefore, I cannot be mistaken in thinking that I am¹⁵

As in Matthews' proposal inspected above, here (1) *Si fallor, sum* is not the elliptical formulation of a whole argument concluding one's existence, but the first premiss of an argument for the impossibility of being in error about one's existence.¹⁶ The other premiss, (2), is the contrapositive of Matthews's (M1) and is clearly stated in T72; but how does the conclusion (3) follow these premisses? It is obvious that (1) and (2) entail, by transitivity, the unstated 'If I am mistaken in thinking that I am, I am not mistaken in thinking that I am'; and (3) follows from this conditional by *Consequentia Mirabilis*:

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|--|-----------------------------------|
| (1) If <i>p</i> , then <i>q</i> | |
| (2) If <i>q</i> , then not- <i>p</i> | |
| <2.1> If <i>p</i> , then not- <i>p</i> | From (1) and (2), by transitivity |
-
- (3) Therefore, not-*p* From <2.1>, by CM

Just as in his *Soliloquia* argument for the imperishability of truth (cf. part I, chapter 7), while not making *explicit* use of CM Augustine seems to be relying here on its validity, again marking his difference from all the other

¹¹ For similar reconstructions cf. Kirwan 1983: 221 and Matthews's later revision in Matthews 1992: 33–4.

¹² *Si fallor, sum*.

¹³ *Nam qui non est, utique nec falli potest*. To adopt the jargon which Hintikka (1962a) uses in his analysis of Descartes' *Cogito*, Augustine's reason for the truth of premiss (1) is not (unlike in the case of the *Cogito*) the existentially self-defeating character of the first person performance of 'I am mistaken in thinking that I am' (or of 'I am not'), but the general inference of the form $B(a) \rightarrow (\exists x)(x=a)$ (if an individual has an attribute, e.g. being mistaken, it exists, where non-existence is not, of course, to be considered an 'attribute').

¹⁴ *Quomodo esse me fallor, quando certum est me esse?*

¹⁵ *Procul dubio in eo, quod me novi esse, non fallor*.

¹⁶ According to Coughlan, 'in post-Wittgensteinian terminology, "*Si fallor, sum*" makes a grammatical point: only of things which at least exist does it make sense to say that they might be mistaken' (1982: 149). Actually, however, Augustine uses this point to make a *different* point, the impossibility of being mistaken about one's existence (and it is not clear anyway that the point used could be correctly called 'grammatical', or that Wittgenstein himself would have called it 'grammatical').

sources for self-refutation arguments we have discussed so far.¹⁷ What we could not find in so many earlier arguments makes its unheralded (and indeed tacit) appearance, again, with Augustine at the end of antiquity.

Matthews's emphasis on the point that Augustine is not reasoning constructively, to prove his own existence, but is arguing destructively, against sceptical challenges, which might appear to be in perfect tune with the ancient approach to self-refutation, must then be qualified in light of what we have just seen. Surely Augustine's argument is meant to provide a dialectical refutation of the Sceptics inasmuch as it answers their suspicion 'What if you are mistaken?'¹⁸ by proving that error about one's existence is, as a matter of logic, impossible. However, Augustine's argument is not dialectical in the narrower sense we have used in our discussion of ancient self-refutation: for it does not retort the doubt of the Sceptics against them to show that they themselves are committed to admitting Augustine's existence whenever they suggest he might be mistaken even in thinking that he exists. We can imagine how such a different *ad hominem* strategy would run: 'You protest that perhaps I am mistaken about my own existence; but certainly to be mistaken I must exist; so whenever you express your doubts, actually you are the first to accept my existence.' Unlike Augustine's actual argument, this would not amount to a proof of the impossibility of being mistaken about one's existence, but only of the self-refuting character of the sceptical objection.

This clarification about the use of 'dialectical' brings me to another point on which my analysis diverges from Matthews's. It is undeniable that Augustine's argument is not aimed at proving his existence *directly*; however, it is precisely because, unlike narrowly dialectical arguments, it does prove some absolute truth (the impossibility that one is mistaken whenever one thinks that one exists) that it can *also* be used to prove one's existence. If no one can erroneously believe he exists, whoever believes he

¹⁷ I could not find any obvious historical antecedent for Augustine's argument. The only argument loosely related is far from brilliant:

ἔστι δὲ γε ψυχὴ, φασίν, εἴγε καὶ ὁ λέγων μὴ εἶναι ψυχὴν αὐτῇ προσχρώμενος τοῦτο ἀποφαίνεται.

But the soul exists, they claim, since even he who says that the soul does not exist asserts this by using it. (S.E. M 9.198)

The idea that only beings with a soul can make assertions obviously begs the question against the deniers of the existence of soul. For the idea, perhaps with the same origin, that what is evident must of necessity be used (προσχωρῶνται) even by those who contradict it see Epict. *Disc.* 2.20.1 (cf. p. 115n70 and p. 345n123). For a possible source of inspiration for Augustine's argument cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.12–13.

¹⁸ Cf. also Rist 1994: 64.

exists, does exist; and since Augustine does believe he exists, he can prove to himself and to the Sceptic that he exists.¹⁹ According to Matthews, Augustine 'considers knowledge of his own existence direct and immediate and therefore as something neither capable of justification by appeal to something more basic, nor, of course, requiring any such justification' (1972: 159–60). None the less, our direct certainty of our own existence might be confirmed by, or might even partially consist in, the fact that we cannot even coherently doubt it, because error about it is logically impossible, as the *Si fallor, sum* establishes. This is what in fact emerges from our texts: in T71 the evident status of one's existence is treated as a consequence of the impossibility of being mistaken about it; in T72 the absolute certainty of one's existence is guaranteed by the absence of the usual sources of error and the demonstrable inefficacy of the sceptical objection; in T73 the *intima scientia* by which we know we are alive is not treated as something distinct from the lack of fear of being mistaken which results from the *Si fallor, sum*.²⁰

Whether Augustine's primary aim was to conclude the impossibility of being mistaken about one's existence, or, just a little step further, the necessity of one's existence whenever one considers it, what is essential for us is that *Si fallor, sum* is the key premiss in a CM apparently unknown to his predecessors.

The logic of the *Si fallor, sum* differs in an instructive way from that of another interesting Augustinian argument:

T74 Let us consider more carefully the things which we have posited, that all the minds know themselves and are certain of themselves . . . But who could doubt that he lives, remembers, understands, wants, thinks, knows and judges? For even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he doubts; if he doubts, he understands that he doubts; if he doubts, he wants to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows that he does not know; if he doubts, he agrees that he ought not to give assent rashly. Therefore, whoever doubts about other things, ought not to doubt about all these things; for if they were not the case, he could not doubt about anything.²¹ (*Trin.* 10.10.14)

¹⁹ Cf. Kirwan 1983: 221.

²⁰ Similarly, at *Trin.* 10.10.14 self-certainty, an attribute of all minds, is one and the same thing as the impossibility of consistently being in doubt about the fundamental characteristics of our mind (cf. T74 below).

²¹ Et ea quae posuimus, omnes mentes de se ipsis nosse certasque esse, diligentius attendamus . . . Vivere se tamen et meminisse, et intellegere, et velle, et cogitare, et scire, et iudicare quis dubitet? Quandoquidem etiam si dubitat, vivit; si dubitat, unde dubitet meminit; si dubitat, dubitare se intellegit; si dubitat, certus esse vult; si dubitat, cogitat; si dubitat, scit se nescire; si dubitat, iudicat non se temere consentire oportere. Quisquis igitur alicunde dubitat, de his omnibus dubitare non debet; quae si non essent, de ulla re dubitare non posset.

Augustine argues that one ought not to doubt certain basic truths about oneself (for example, that one is alive, remembers, wants, thinks), because the very act of doubting them implies the truth of what is being doubted and, conversely, what is being doubted is a necessary pre-condition for the very possibility of all doubts, these included.²² In other words, he argues for the impossibility of doubting certain things *consistently*, and not for the absolute impossibility, logical or psychological, of doubting them. For example, I can doubt (incoherently) whether I am alive, without realising that my very doubting proves well enough that I am alive,²³ whereas I cannot mistakenly think that I am alive. Unlike in the *Si fallor, sum*, the incoherent doubts that Augustine considers in T74 might be labelled pragmatically self-refuting in a way parallel to Mackie's strict formal analysis discussed in chapter 10: their occurrence is not barred, but at the same time it is sufficient to *verify* their content, thus dispelling them.

T74 can be usefully compared to an interestingly different argument which Augustine presents in the first book of his *De Libero Arbitrio* (*On Free Choice*):

T75 Aug.: Now I ask you whether we have a will.

Evod.: I don't know.

Aug.: Do you want to know this?

Evod.: I don't know this either.

Aug.: Then ask me nothing more.

Evod.: Why?

Aug.: Because I ought not to answer your question unless you want to know what you ask. Secondly, because unless you want to attain to wisdom, I ought not to discuss such things with you. Finally, you can't be my friend, unless you want my well-being. But surely you will have already seen whether you, as regards yourself, do not have any will to live happily.

Evod.: I admit it, it cannot be denied that we have will.²⁴ (*Lib. Arb.* 1.12.25)

²² The idea that genuine doubt requires understanding that one is doubting is also used by Augustine in *Ver. Relig.* 39.73 (cf. p. 123n7).

²³ Or so Augustine's argument goes: on a certain conception of what it is to be alive, I might perhaps doubt whether I am alive and then discover that I am in fact dead and about to enter the gates of Heaven.

²⁴ A.: Nam quaero abs te, sitne aliqua nobis voluntas.

E.: Nescio.

A.: Visne hoc scire?

E.: Et hoc nescio.

A.: Nihil ergo deinceps me interroges.

E.: Quare?

A.: Quia roganti tibi respondere non debeo, nisi volenti scire quod rogas. Deinde nisi velis ad sapientiam pervenire, sermo tecum de huiusmodi rebus non est habendus. Postremo meus amicus esse non poteris, nisi velis ut bene sit mihi. Iam vero de te tu ipse videris, utrum tibi voluntas nulla sit beatæ vitæ tuæ.

E.: Fateor, negari non potest habere nos voluntatem.

Whereas in T74 doubting whether one has will is already an actual manifestation of will (the will to become certain that one has will), in T75 *disavowing knowledge* of whether one has will (*voluntas*) is not by itself sufficient to establish, by pragmatic self-refutation, the existence of will. For, as Harrison lucidly comments,

Evodius *could* (that is, it is open to him to) persist in denying knowledge of the will... keep saying 'nescio'. This, however, would entail his giving up on knowledge, on the search of knowledge, and indeed on *dialogue*... My denying that I have will is, we might say, self-defeating, in the sense that it does away with a condition for my further participation in the conversation and for my learning: my will to know. (1999: 202, italics mine)

It is 'only' because Evodius²⁵ is not ready to give up inquiry and dialogue that he is forced to admit, in the end, the existence of will. After a demonstration by CM that we could never be mistaken about our own existence (T72) and a pragmatic self-refutation argument concluding that certain doubts dispel themselves in virtue of their very existence (T74), we encounter in T75 something which bears some interesting resemblance to those forms of dialectical self-refutation which we have examined in chapters 10 and 11. Just as you cannot even debate with me about and against certain fundamental philosophical concepts (reasons, signs and proofs) or philosophy itself unless you are ready to make some use of them, thus also acknowledging their existence and importance, in the same way you, as a human being, cannot enter meaningful conversation with me about the will unless you are ready to acknowledge at least that you are driven into it by some basic motivations, such as the will to know, that could not exist unless there were something like a will.²⁶

²⁵ For the view that the standard identification of Augustine's interlocutor with Evodius is inaccurate cf. Harrison 1999: 205n20.

²⁶ For in-depth discussion of T75, its context, its pivotal role within the *De Libero Arbitrio*, and its relation with other '*cogito*-like' arguments cf. Harrison 2006.

CHAPTER 13

A step back: operational self-refutations in Plato

13.1 WHAT IS OPERATIONAL SELF-REFUTATION?

In the previous chapters of part II we have focused on several cases in which, roughly speaking, a certain propositional content was denounced as being in conflict with, or perhaps falsified by, the particular way in which it was put forward. This is a logical ailment which Mackie calls 'pragmatic self-refutation', but which, I have recommended, is best split into the two distinct notions of *ad hominem* self-refutation and (strict) pragmatic self-refutation. Mackie also introduced a stronger form of self-refutation (though weaker than the absolute one),¹ which he baptised '*operational* self-refutation': a proposition *p* is operationally self-refuting when, although it could be true, there is *no way* of coherently presenting it, since the very act of asserting *p* also entails a commitment to something else which is in conflict with *p*, and thus to a contradiction.² For example, Mackie explains, "I believe nothing" seems to be operationally self-refuting; I may in fact believe nothing, but I cannot myself coherently assert that this is so' (1964: 197), since 'anyone who asserts that he believes nothing implicitly commits himself to asserting that he believes that he believes nothing, and hence to denying his original assertion' (196).³ In more formal terms, Mackie

¹ Cf. chapter 2.

² This is based on the disputable assumption that 'the only possible way of presenting the item is to "coherently assert" it' (Mackie 1964: 197). Elsewhere Mackie limits himself to the weaker and more plausible claim that operationally self-refuting propositions cannot be coherently *asserted*, leaving the possibility open that there may be coherent alternative non-assertoric modes of presentations for operationally self-refuting propositions.

³ Mackie's account of operational self-refutation is reminiscent of what Passmore had called 'absolute self-refutation': 'formally, the proposition *p* is absolutely self-refuting, if to assert *p* is equivalent to asserting *both p and not-p*' (1961: 60); 'only if a philosophical argument can show in this way that a sentence can propose nothing – because what it asserts, if it were taken to propose something, would be inconsistent with the presuppositions of all proposing – is it pointing, I suggest, to an absolute self-refutation. To assert that, for example, "there are no truths" is to assert both that there are and there are not truths because, precisely, to assert is to *assert to be true*' (68).

proves that 'for any [operator] d that is prefixable in the weaker sense⁴ that asserting that p would implicitly commit one to asserting that dp , $\neg a(\neg(\exists p)dp)$ is a logical law, that is, the proposition symbolised by $\neg(\exists p)dp$ cannot be coherently asserted, and hence this proposition is operationally self-refuting' (197). Here is Mackie's demonstration for the fan of logical formalism:

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|---|---|
| (1) $ap \rightarrow adp$ | Law for the weakly prefixable operators d 's |
| (2) $\neg(ap \wedge a\neg p)$ | First rule governing coherent assertion ⁵ |
| (3) $(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (ap \rightarrow aq)$ | Second rule governing coherent assertion ⁶ |
| (4) $a(\neg(\exists p)dp) \rightarrow ad(\neg(\exists p)dp)$ | From (1), by substitution |
| (5) $d(\neg(\exists p)dp) \rightarrow \neg(\neg(\exists p)dp)$ | Existential generalisation and double negation |
| (6) $ad(\neg(\exists p)dp) \rightarrow a\neg(\neg(\exists p)dp)$ | From (5) and (3) |
| (7) $a(\neg(\exists p)dp) \rightarrow a\neg(\neg(\exists p)dp)$ | From (4) and (6), by transitivity |
| (8) $a(\neg(\exists p)dp) \rightarrow (a(\neg(\exists p)dp) \wedge a\neg(\neg(\exists p)dp))$ | From (7), by the law $(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (p \rightarrow (p \wedge q))$ |
| (9) $\neg a(\neg(\exists p)dp)$ | From (8) and (2), by <i>modus tollendo tollens</i> |

As Mackie admits, one major issue is to determine what operators are weakly prefixable, that is to 'decide in what circumstances someone is implicitly committed to asserting something' (196) when asserting something else. The only examples Mackie mentions are 'I think that', 'I believe that', 'It is intelligible that', and, with less confidence, 'I know that'. Whenever I assert some proposition p , I am thereby committing myself at least to assert also that p is an object of my thinking, that I believe that p , and that p is intelligible; but then it is incoherent (operationally self-refuting) to

⁴ Weaker than the sense in which the operators involved in Mackie's absolute self-refutation are also prefixable (cf. part 1, chapter 2).

⁵ 'One cannot coherently assert a self-contradiction' (Mackie 1964: 196). The way Mackie formalises this rule is objectionable: $\neg(ap \wedge a\neg p)$ corresponds to 'it is not the case that two assertions with contradictory contents are both coherent'. $\neg a(p \wedge \neg p)$ would have been a better formalisation of Mackie's intended rule.

⁶ 'Anyone who asserts something is thereby implicitly committed to asserting at least whatever is entailed by what he asserts' (Mackie 1964: 196). For an objection to Mackie's formalisation here cf. n. 9 below.

make assertions such as 'I am not thinking anything', 'I have no beliefs', or 'Nothing is intelligible'. When we come to 'I know that', however, the question of whether this is an operator involved in operational self-refutation becomes immediately thorny: is it really true that by asserting something I am thereby committing myself to the claim that I know what I am asserting?⁷ If the identity of the relevant prefixable operators is debatable, then also the real success of the corresponding self-refutation arguments will be equally debatable.⁸

Another difficulty for Mackie's formal account of operational self-refutation, which will become apparent as soon as we get to the inspection of some alleged ancient instances, is that often it is impossible to single out an operator of the requested kind expressing the commitments of one's asserting that p . This makes it unworkable in most cases to fit the actual argument within the rigid logical cast presented above;⁹ none the less, let us examine whether Mackie's informal account of operational self-refutation can still be a serviceable tool for our exegesis of the ancient arguments.

13.2 THE REFUTATION OF EXTREME FLUX (THT. 179C–183B)

At the end of chapter 4 in part 1 we left Protagoras rushing off back to Hades after incurring a disastrous reversal handed him by Socrates. The Measure Doctrine in its broadest scope is no longer tenable by Protagoras, or indeed anyone else, but perhaps some fragment of it can still survive the

⁷ For a positive answer cf. Williamson 2000: 43.

⁸ One operator that seems to be weakly prefixable but that Mackie does not mention is 'It is true that': we can argue that it is (operationally) self-refuting to assert that 'Nothing is true', because to assert something is to assert it to be true (cf. my analysis of T35 in section 2 of chapter 6, p. 120n82 and n. 3 above). Probably Mackie does not include 'It is true that' among his weakly prefixable operators since he already includes it among the (unqualified) prefixable operators involved in stronger absolute self-refutation (for my criticism of Mackie's strategy cf. chapter 2 in part 1).

⁹ Probably it is for this reason that Mackie claims to be offering a formal analysis of the 'elementary types of self-refutation' (1964: 193, italics mine; cf. 'basic types' (197)). Mackie's formal reconstruction of operational self-refutation also has some intrinsic shortcomings. I have signalled one of them in n. 5 above; let me mention another one here. According to Mackie, the 'variable operator a ' is 'to be read as "x coherently asserts that"' (196). On this reading, however, most of the steps of Mackie's argument become puzzling, starting from the defining law of weakly prefixable operators: it seems false that if x asserts that the sky is blue, then x also asserts that he believes the sky is blue. To restore the plausibility of his argument, Mackie should assume that the symbol \rightarrow carries here some deontic import such as 'it is obligatory to' or 'one is committed to', but he only claims that \rightarrow indicates 'entailment'. A better reading for a would have been 'it is coherent for x to assert that'. For the related notion of 'pragmatic implication' cf. the literature listed in the second part of n. 6 on p. 3; for further criticism of Mackie's account of operational self-refutation cf. Bonney 1966.

wreck. Although in questions concerning what is beneficial and harmful, for the individual and the city, i.e. questions involving skilled predictions about the future, not everyone can be considered a measure of truth (177d–179b), perhaps MD holds good in the sphere of sense-perception (171e, 179c), which is exactly where it had started from, and even as far as values such as ‘the fine’ and ‘the foul’, ‘the just’ and ‘the unjust’, ‘the pious’ and ‘the impious’ are concerned (172a–b; 177c–d). Starting from 179c Socrates undertakes to assess whether the original perceptual core of Narrow Protagoreanism, and thus Theaetetus’ definition of knowledge as perception, are strong enough to resist conviction, by examining more closely that Secret Doctrine which had been introduced as the ontological framework for MD.¹⁰ According to Theodorus, however, there is no way of discussing SD with its supporters, since the ‘people of Ephesus’ (i.e. the Heracliteanising promoters of flux), ‘in conformity with their texts, keep moving’ and refuse to engage in proper dialectic: they keep ‘drawing out enigmatic little expressions from their quiver, so to speak’, but then they refuse to explain what they mean by them and ‘take very good care not to allow anything to be stable, either in what they say or in their souls’. They are so far from being ready to engage in cooperative dialectic with outsiders that they do not even team up with one another, so that they have neither pupils nor masters (179e3–180c5). In light of this grim picture of the Heraclitean party, the only reasonable course of action for Socrates and the geometriician Theodorus is to take over SD themselves, and investigate it ‘as if it were a geometrical problem’ (180c5–6), starting from its ‘first principle’ (ἀρχή),¹¹ change (181c1). When the Heracliteans say that all things change in a perennial flux, do they refer to one form of change only, or both to spatial movement (φορὰ)¹² and to alteration (ἀλλοίωσις) (181c–d)?¹³ Socrates and Theodorus agree that the Heracliteans must mean that everything always changes in both ways, ‘with every change’ (181e–182a);¹⁴ otherwise in their view it would be ‘no more correct to say that everything changes than to say that everything is at rest’ (181e6–7). It has been suggested that this indifference argument¹⁵ is hardly conclusive, that the

¹⁰ The fragment of value relativism will not be discussed and refuted explicitly in the dialogue, but I agree with Sedley (2004: 165) that the ‘digression’ at 172b–177c functions as an attack on it.

¹¹ Cf. the analogous way in which MD had been approached at 169e8–170a1 to introduce the self-refutation argument (p. 44).

¹² φορὰ includes both translocation from place to place and turning round in the same place (181c6–7).

¹³ At *Prmd.* 138b8–c1 we are told that these are the only two forms of change.

¹⁴ Socrates slips from ‘in both ways’ (181e4: ἀμφοτέρως) to ‘with every change’ (182a: πᾶσαν κίνησιν) as if these phrases were synonymous, but the substitution might not be completely innocent (cf. p. 212n27).

¹⁵ On indifference arguments in ancient philosophy cf. Makin 1993.

radical extension of flux which it propels is not something to which a loyal supporter of the Heraclitean views need be committed, and that, therefore, the subsequent refutation of this unnecessarily extreme theory leaves the original SD unscathed, because of irrelevance.¹⁶ Other interpreters have argued that this radicalisation of SD is not illegitimate, because it is exactly what is needed to successfully support Theaetetus’ KR; they differ, however, in their conjectures of why it is needed.¹⁷

However that may be, the agreed attribution of all forms of change to everything is immediately projected by Socrates back on to the building blocks of the SD theory of perception. We had learnt that the parents, two ‘slow changes’, enjoy constant *alteration* because the twin offspring they beget by their intercourse, i.e. the two ‘quick changes’ perception and perceived quality,¹⁸ *move* in the intermediate space¹⁹ back to their parents and qualify them: the passive parent is filled with the perception and becomes a perceiver of such-and-such quality (in relation to the active parent), the active one is filled with the perceived quality and becomes qualified in such-and-such way (for the passive parent) (cf. part 1, chapter 4, section 2.1). Now we realise that if all change is all-pervasive, the two parents also must be in constant movement,²⁰ and, what is more crucial for the following argument, the twins must undergo constant alteration as well. But then, ‘not even this remains at rest, that what flows flows

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. McDowell 1973: 184. This view is also formulated in a particularly incisive way, but then rejected, by Denyer 1991: 101–2.

¹⁷ According to Burnyeat, the radicalisation of flux is necessary to prevent the possibility of error by barring the possibility that perceivers misinterpret their perceptions in their perceptual judgements (1990: 49–51). In a similar vein, Sedley (2004: 96) proposes that it is second-order perception about one’s current perceptual modality that is at issue: ‘there would be time to revise the judgment that you are seeing, or hearing, or smelling, and to conclude that on reflection your current experience is merely a hallucination or dream’. Denyer (1991: 102–3) suggests that by infecting the SD offspring with every form of change (cf. below) Plato is now allowing for the repeatability of qualifiers in MD, something he had excluded in the previous self-refutation argument at 171a–c (cf. p. 54n76), to show that also this more extreme version of the theory is untenable (for a difficulty for this interpretation cf. p. 212n30). On all these readings, however, the explicit indifference argument given by Socrates for radicalising SD would not represent the real philosophical and dialectical rationale for this strategic move (cf. Lee 2005: 116).

¹⁸ It is in this summary of SD that the Greek noun ποιότης is coined by Plato (182a9–b1).

¹⁹ As Sedley (2004: 91) convincingly argues, the rapidity of the spatial movement of the twin offspring is ‘a feature no doubt primarily designed to account for the high (if non-uniform) speed at which the distance senses operate, although it is taken to occur even in the contact senses’.

²⁰ As Sedley notices, ‘nothing is specifically said about the locomotion of the parents, but it is not hard to work out that they must be constantly undergoing *some* degree of locomotion in relation to each other in order to ensure the total instability of the relativities in which their constitutive properties consist. (It is here important to notice that locomotion, as defined at 181c6–7, includes not just translocation but also turning on the spot, which will allow observers to change their perspectives without necessarily always shifting location.)’ (2004: 92).

white, but it changes, so that there is flux also of this very thing, whiteness, and change into another colour'²¹ (182d1–3). On this radicalised version of SD, the private stream of whiteness generated by the present encounter of two parents (say, Socrates' eye and a stone) is itself subject to constant alteration; but then the parent which gets qualified by this ever-altering twin, the stone, will be characterised by the same constant qualitative alteration. Is this development surprising? According to Sedley,

this is the first time that the constant qualitative change of the twin offspring has been recognised, but *it is only what was to be expected*: if, for example, a parent such as a stone is, *as we already knew* it must be, in constant qualitative change, including change of colour, it follows directly that its offspring, for instance this or that shade of white generated by the stone in interaction with some seeing eye, must have no duration either. (2004: 93, italics mine)

I believe this diagnosis overlooks an important point: the kind of change which the SD's complex machinery was designed to explain was not simply, or even primarily, the qualitative alteration which ordinary objects undergo *through time*, not even a frenetic constant alteration.²² The purpose of SD was to provide a setting for Protagoras' relativism, allowing for the truth of synchronic inconsistent perceptions and judgements on the basis of a radically alternative ontology in which 'nothing *is* one, either any thing or qualified in any way whatsoever' (152d6) and 'all the things which we incorrectly say to be are in the process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one another' (152d7–e1), where 'coming to be' is always shorthand for 'coming to be *in relation to something*'. The SD we did know wiped away the possibility of error by eliminating objectivity at any given time: since the stone in itself is neither white nor any other colour, and it becomes white only for Socrates, Socrates cannot be mistaken in his perception, which is the perfectly matching twin of the perceived quality which also exists only in relation to him. The same stone, at exactly the same time, can become grey for Protagoras, who will thus perceive it as grey, with no real contradiction with Socrates' different perceptual state. But this neither requires nor suggests that the two private streams of whiteness and greyness must themselves endure total instability:

²¹ οὐδὲ τοῦτο μένει, τὸ λευκὸν εἶναι τὸ ῥέον, ἀλλὰ μεταβάλλει, ὥστε καὶ αὐτοῦ τούτου εἶναι ῥοήν, τῆς λευκότητος, καὶ μεταβολὴν εἰς ἄλλην χροάν.

²² Note that the noun ἀλλοίωσις had not been used in the discussion of SD to describe the changes undergone by the parents through their mutual interaction and the corresponding verb occurs only once in the presentation of SD (157b7).

Socrates can perceive the stone as white for substantial time spans, in which the stone will remain white for him, and Protagoras can enjoy the same degree of stability in his vision of greyness. In other words, I suggest that the original SD allowed for *some limited* amount of diachronic stability in the existence of relativised perceptual qualities and in the truth of relativised statements like 'The stone is white for Socrates'. The original SD admitted (and in fact required), of course, a great amount of diachronic change too (cf. e.g. 154a); but although this night the stone will probably appear yellowish to Socrates (and thus will be so for him) in artificial light, whiteness can now flow white for Socrates in midday sunlight, at least for some minutes and until a cloud veils the sun.

By infecting the twin offspring with constant qualitative change, we get then a radically new theory at this turn of the dialogue. The stone is still something completely unqualified in itself, but now the way it comes to be relatively qualified changes not only in relation to different perceivers but also constantly, through time, in relation to any single perceiver. The private stream of whiteness generated by the stone's encounter with Socrates' eye no longer 'flows white', but instantaneously alters into different shades (e.g. from dull into glistening white) or colours (e.g. from white into yellow). It is easy to conjecture that, since both twins have now been admitted to undergo constant ἀλλοίωσις, Socrates' visual perception of the colour of the stone must also alter accordingly at any given instant, being the perception of continuously shifting shades and colours. This result is of course alarming in itself, since as a matter of fact we do not experience any such constant change in our perceptions. However, Socrates' worry is the different one that, if such a continuous alteration permeates reality, our language is bound to fail to express it adequately: successful reference to any quality we are currently perceiving will become unattainable (182d4–5), because 'while one is speaking it is always slipping away because of its flux'²³ (182d7). As Sedley comments, what is here envisaged seems to be the 'threat of sentences becoming out of date before they have even been fully uttered', a threat 'familiar to anyone who has listened to the techniques of commentators of fast-moving sports' (2004: 95).²⁴ But, again, this seems to me a difficulty to which the original SD was not exposed: on that theory, whenever I was seeing the stone as white I was entitled to say, in no

²³ ἀεὶ λέγοντος ὑπεξέρχεται ἅτε δὴ ῥέον.

²⁴ Cf. *Crat.* 439d8–11. Another worry for the radicalised SD is that it becomes very difficult to imagine how a language could ever be taught or learnt in these conditions, but this worry is not voiced in the *Theaetetus*.

particular hurry, 'The stone is white', and my utterance would have been incorrigibly true for me.²⁵

As envisaged above, Socrates' next move is to infect with alteration also the remaining twin, perception. But this happens with a further twist:

776 Socr.: And what shall we say about perception of any sort whatsoever, for example that of seeing or hearing? <Shall we say> it ever remains the same seeing or hearing?

Theod.: Certainly we ought not, if really everything changes.

Socr.: Therefore we ought not even to call something seeing any more than not seeing, or some other perception any more than not, if at any rate everything changes in every way.²⁶ (182d8–e6)

Change is now so pervasive²⁷ that not only are our perceptual contents constantly changing, but for any particular modality of perception (e.g. seeing) we can no more say that this is seeing than not (as it is constantly altering into hearing, or tasting).²⁸ But while the idea of a sight of white immediately altering into a sight of grey, and then again into a sight of black, is at least intelligible, the idea of a sight of white suddenly becoming a taste of strawberries (or perhaps, and even more absurdly, a taste of white) defies imagination.²⁹ Notice again the emphasis on what we can and cannot say: the problem envisaged here seems to be, just as before, that in the very instant I finish uttering 'I'm seeing (a) white (stone)' my sentence is already long out of date, because my perception is no longer a sight.³⁰

²⁵ In fact, what would have been objectionable in the original version of SD is the use of the subject noun 'the stone' to refer to the active parent (cf. 157b4–5: cf. point (3) on p. 215), and not the relativised attribution to it of the predicate 'white'.

²⁶ ΣΩ. Τί δὲ περὶ αἰσθήσεως ἐροῦμεν ὁποιασοῦν, ὅσον τῆς τοῦ ὁρᾶν ἢ ἀκούειν; μένειν ποτὲ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ὁρᾶν ἢ ἀκούειν;

ΘΕΟ. Οὐκ οὐκ δεῖ γε, εἴπερ πάντα κινεῖται.

ΣΩ. Οὔτε ἄρα ὁρᾶν προσρητέον τι μᾶλλον ἢ μὴ ὁρᾶν, οὐδὲ τινὲς ἄλλην αἰσθησιν μᾶλλον ἢ μή, πάντων γε πάντως κινουμένων.

²⁷ Notice Socrates' emphasis on the qualification 'if at any rate everything changes in every way' (and not in the two ways, locomotion and alteration, originally identified; cf. p. 208n14). If everything must always be changing in all respects, then a sight of white must change not only in its content, but also in its being a sight (cf. Bostock 1988: 101). As Bostock (103) remarks, such a radical flux 'is actually self-contradictory. For if a thing is changing at all times, then there is one respect in which it never changes, namely it never changes from changing to not changing'.

²⁸ Cf. McDowell 1973: 181, Bostock 1988: 100–1, McCabe 2000: 112, Sedley 2004: 95–6.

²⁹ Although synesthesia is an existing phenomenon, the constant and radical change in perceptual modality under discussion seems to be impossible to reconcile with our understanding of what perceptual experience is.

³⁰ It is worth noting that the ἀλλοίωσις undergone by the twins does not seem to have the same status as the slow change of the parents. As we have seen, that slow change is explained in terms of the original SD quadripartite theory of perception, but this does not seem to be the case for the twins' own ἀλλοίωσις: for that to happen, the twins themselves, while undergoing spatial movement,

The worst, however, is yet to come. Socrates argues that when Theaetetus and he had answered the original question 'What is knowledge?', they had come out with something, perception, which, at the end of the current 'geometrical' analysis of SD, has turned out to be 'no more knowledge than not knowledge' (182e11–12).³¹ As we have seen in section 2 of chapter 4, SD had been brought into the discussion precisely to clarify how Theaetetus' KR could be correct, by providing a suitable ontology of private relativised qualities and incorrigible private perceptions of them. But that theory, pushed to its extreme consequences, has killed the patient by overdose: if Theaetetus' definition is guaranteed to be correct, its contradictory will also be equally correct and, in general,

777 every answer, on whatever subject the answer may be, is equally correct, both to say that things are (or, if you like, come to be) so and that they are <(or come to be)> not so.³² (183a5–7)

This is no longer the equal correctness (relative truth) of Socrates' 'the wind is (becoming) cold (for me)' and Protagoras' 'the wind is (becoming) warm (for me)' which SD was meant to guarantee; this is the equal correctness, at a given time, of Socrates' two possible utterances 'the wind is (becoming) cold (for me)' and 'the wind is not (becoming) cold (for me)', because the temperature of the wind is necessarily changing for him at every instant. And this kind of equal correctness sounds dangerously close to an equal lack of correctness, or at least to a complete indeterminacy as to the truth-value of either answer.³³ This is certainly a lethal blow for Theaetetus: as Sedley nicely puts it, 'Theaetetus' definition of knowledge really does undermine itself: it is a definition that presupposes a world in which there can be no definitions' (2004: 99), and, more generally, there can be no real dialectic,

should act at the same time as parents that, by interacting with other parents, become variously qualified by relative properties. This would have been possible when SD had been broadened beyond the scope of perception: if Socrates perceives the stone as white, but Protagoras believes that Socrates is perceiving it as grey, then the quality and perception generated in the encounter between Socrates and the stone would become whiteness and sight of white in relation to Socrates and greyness and sight of grey in relation to Protagoras (for Protagoras, the stone is grey for Socrates). This absurdly complex mechanism is in fact what would be required if one wanted to account for the repeatability of qualifiers in the terms of SD (cf. p. 209n17); but once MD has been narrowed down to perception only, it is no longer available (unless one maintains that Protagoras' belief that Socrates is perceiving the stone as grey is itself 'perceptual').

³¹ The exact rationale of this step of the argument is far from clear. For a sensitive discussion of its problematic logic cf. Sedley 2004: 96–7.

The idea that in the presence of constant flux there cannot be knowledge and knowledge itself does not remain knowledge occurs also at *Crat.* 439c–440c.

³² πᾶσα ἀπόκρισις, περὶ οὗτου ἂν τις ἀποκρίνηται, ὁμοίως ὁρθῇ εἶναι, οὕτω τ' ἔχειν φάναι καὶ μὴ οὕτω, εἰ δὲ βούλει, γίγνεσθαι.

³³ Cf. Denyer 1991: 104, Sedley 2004: 98.

since any answer³⁴ turns out to be indifferent.³⁵ But is the conclusion of T77 equally lethal for the 'people of Ephesus'? We already knew that they emphatically refuse to engage in dialectic, so probably they will not be bothered by Socrates' proof that they cannot. We also know that Heraclitus himself was keen on oracular pronouncements easy to interpret as patent violations of PNC,³⁶ so the discovery that they are equally committed to both members of contradictions ('things are both so and not so') might leave them unfazed as well.³⁷

I believe it is specifically against such a possible defiant stance that Socrates levels his final attack:

T78 One must not use even this 'so' (for 'so' would no longer be changing), nor again 'not so' (for this is not a change either); but those who state this theory must establish some other expression; as it is now, at least, they have no words for their thesis³⁸ (πρὸς τὴν αὐτῶν ὑπόθεσιν οὐκ ἔχουσι ῥήματα), unless 'not even so',³⁹ said indefinitely, should suit them best.⁴⁰ (183a11–b5)

At the end of the day, dialectically pointless contradictory utterances are not that viable option they might have appeared to be to the extreme

³⁴ It is difficult to see how 'every answer' will turn out to be true even on the most radical version of the flux theory. For, even in the presence of constant and ultra-fast change, it is difficult to imagine that in the time taken by the utterance to be made the entire spectrum of qualitative changes will be exhausted. I suspect that the underlying issue here must be not only epistemological, but also metaphysical: if the quality of whiteness will *eventually* turn into every other quality, there is no more reason *now* to say that it is white than to say that it is grey, pink or any colour whatsoever (cf. *Resp.* v, 479b–c).

³⁵ This outcome might be described as a form of self-refutation: Theaetetus' definition commits him to a theory which in turn commits him also to the contradictory of that definition. It must be noticed that Socrates envisages the possibility that κρ finds support in some different ontology (183c1–3), so the present outcome is not an inescapable one for Theaetetus, at least in principle.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. DK22B10: 'Joints: whole and not whole, connected separate, consonant dissonant, one from all and all from one' (συνάμμιες ὅλα καὶ οὐχ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾷδον διαίδον, καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα); DK22B49a: 'In the same rivers we both step and do not step, we are and we are not' (ποταμοῖς τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐμβαίνομεν τε καὶ οὐκ ἐμβαίνομεν, εἰμέν τε καὶ οὐκ εἰμέν). Certainly Aristotle took the Heracliteans to deny PNC (cf. e.g. *Metaph.* Γ 5, 1010a7–15).

³⁷ I am much indebted to Sedley's idea that in the *Theaetetus* 'it is the Heracliteans themselves who have, from the outset, been presented as voluntarily self-denying about the use of language' (2004: 93) and that Socrates seeks 'to find out exactly *how* self-denying about language they must themselves be setting out to be in order to maintain their position' (95). What I interpret differently from Sedley are the starting and final degrees of linguistic self-denial involved. In particular, I shall explain below why I do not believe that what we get *at the end* 'is a collapse, not of language, but of *dialectic*' only (98).

³⁸ For emphasis on the fact that 'thesis' (rather than 'hypothesis') is the correct translation of ὑπόθεσις in many contexts, including some famous Platonic and Aristotelian ones, cf. Cavini 2008: 172–80.

³⁹ For the text adopted here cf. p. 217n51; I shall discuss below some possible emendations.

⁴⁰ δεῖ δὲ οὐδὲ τοῦτο τὸ οὕτω λέγειν – οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἐτι κινεῖτο τὸ οὕτω – οὐδ' αὖ μὴ οὕτω – οὐδὲ γὰρ τοῦτο κίνησις – ἀλλὰ τιν' ἄλλην φωνὴν θεῖον τοῖς τὸν λόγον τοῦτον λέγουσιν, ὥς νῦν γε πρὸς τὴν αὐτῶν ὑπόθεσιν οὐκ ἔχουσι ῥήματα, εἰ μὴ ἅρα τὸ οὐδ' οὕτως μάλιστα ἂν αὐτοῖς ἀρμόττοι, ἅπειρον λεγόμενον.

Heracliteans: they preserve in themselves an ingredient of definite stability, referred to here by the Greek οὕτω ('so') and μὴ οὕτω ('not so'), thus failing to conform fully to ultra-radical flux. I interpret οὕτω as a placeholder for qualitative attributes like 'white': the fundamental lesson of the previous Socratic analysis was that constant alteration characterises not only the parents, but also their offspring, and that whiteness itself does not remain white for any duration of time. But, things being so, there is no stable ποιότης to which the adjective 'white' in the Heracliteanising slogan 'Stone: white and not white' might refer. The use itself of 'white', by trying to 'freeze' that quality to which it purports to refer,⁴¹ is already incompatible with the more extreme developments of the flux theory itself.

The Heraclitean reform of language, which has been a constant theme throughout the presentation of SD, was not radical enough; (1) the verb 'to be', and with it *stable* predications, had to be abandoned in favour of 'to become' (152d7–e1); (2) this very becoming had always to be carefully *relativised* ('relatively to something', 'for somebody', 'of something') (157a7–b1; 160b8–c1); (3) "something", "someone's", "my", "this", "that", or any other word (ὄνομα) that brings to a standstill had to be banned too (157b4–5), presumably because they presuppose the existence of more or less enduring *objects*.⁴² Perhaps a zealous supporter of SD could content himself with saying something like 'there comes to be white',⁴³ without referring to what comes to be white, but in T77 Socrates has concluded that a Heraclitean always ought to add 'and there comes to be not white' in the same breath.

His criticism is now pushed even further in T78: the use itself of the predicate 'white', by presupposing the existence of some enduring and identifiable quality of whiteness, is already inconsistent with the theory.⁴⁴

⁴¹ I take it that at this stage of the argument the ποιότης to which the term 'white' purportedly refers includes, and perhaps conflates, property-tokens and property-types: since the former have been shown not to have any stability at all on the radical SD, the latter cannot be stable either.

⁴² Cf. Bostock 1988: 66. For Plato's dismissal of 'this' and 'that' in the presence of constant change cf. *Tim.* 48d–e.

⁴³ As suggested by Bostock 1988: 66.

⁴⁴ According to Sedley, at 152d2–6 we had already been told that 'there are no determinate subjects or predicates' (2004: 93; italics mine). I believe the subsequent explanation of SD shows that the problem at that stage of the presentation of SD rested in non-relativised *predications*, and not in the use of predicates. It is possible, although not mandatory for my reading, that the use of ῥήματα in T78 is not casual; the distinction between ὀνόματα and ῥήματα as the qualitative distinction between 'subject-names' and 'predicate-descriptions' (as opposed to the quantitative distinction between 'words' and 'phrases'), which will emerge explicitly for the first time only in the *Sophist*, might already be lurking here. Significantly, the pair ὀνόματα–ῥήματα occurs three times in the *Theaetetus* (168b8–c1, 184c1, 206d2), and this might be hinting at the *Sophist's* distinction (cf. Sedley 2004: 169n28; *contra* McDowell 1973: 251, Denyer 1991: 148–9).

After stable and objective predications ((1) + (2)) and subject-referring terms (3), it is now the turn of *predicates* to be hatched. On the assumption that extreme flux is real, our language collapses completely;⁴⁵ apparently there is no way of stretching it to satisfy the requirements of that theory. Although no explicit self-refutation charge is levelled by Plato here, it is not exceedingly strained to import our notion of operational self-refutation, as some commentators have done:⁴⁶ unless the supporters of radical flux devise some new form of expression compatible with their theory, there is no way for them to coherently present it. Formally, this does not imply that their theory is *false*; it 'only' implies that, if it were true, our language would be incapable of expressing it and, more generally, we should refrain from trying to express anything definite whatsoever.⁴⁷

I have argued that Socrates' moral is that if the extreme SD is true, then not only our ordinary language but also various reformed idioms adopted by the Heracliteans should be abandoned. However, Socrates' ostensible conclusion is not that on that theory no language could ever be possible. Undeniably, an option for the 'people of Ephesus' is to give up language (or, at least, verbalised communication) completely: Aristotle informs us that the Heraclitean Cratylus 'in the end considered that he ought to say nothing, and merely moved his finger' (*Metaph.* Γ 5, 1010a12–13),⁴⁸ clearly an attempt to express the pervasiveness of change without inconsistency. Yet Socrates leaves the possibility open for the Heracliteans to coin some new form of expression (φωνή)⁴⁹ consistent with their theory, and he goes

⁴⁵ *Contra* Sedley 2004: 98 (cf. p. 214n37). It seems to me that Sedley does not mark sufficiently the difference between two distinct phases in the argument: 183a5–7 (collapse of dialectic) and 183a10–b5 (more general collapse of our language).

⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. Baltzly 1999: 178, Silverman 2000: 110.

⁴⁷ This point is correctly stressed by Bailey (2006: 118): 'Heraclitus' problem is that he describes a possible world one could not talk or think about were it actual: an intolerably unstable and incoherent world, but a possible world none the less'. In other words, Socrates' argument is at most a 'transcendental argument', i.e. an argument showing that a certain concept or state of affairs (here, some amount of stability) is a necessary pre-condition for that experience, thought and language in which any denial of it can only be accessed and formulated; but transcendental arguments cannot prove, by themselves, the truth of their conclusions, despite what is sometimes suggested. For seminal discussion of the shortcomings of transcendental arguments cf. Stroud 1968.

⁴⁸ On Cratylus, see Sedley 2003: 16–21.

⁴⁹ The common translation of φωνή as 'language' (e.g. Levett's translation in Burnyeat 1990) is too general in this context; what Socrates has in mind is clearly specific expressions or sets of expressions. In fact, although Socrates will give the example of an articulated Greek expression, φωνή ('vocal sound') leaves room also for non-linguistic utterances: as Sedley (2003: 20) signals, 'in his *Rhetoric* (3.16, 1417b1–3), Aristotle quotes the Socratic writer Aeschines of Sphettus, who described Cratylus as waving his hands and *hissing* while he spoke . . . His motion of the hands, and likewise his *hissing* of the tongue, which according to the analysis of primary sounds in Plato's dialogue (427a1–8) is one way in which human voice conveys motion, look like part of Cratylus' increasingly desperate struggle to fit language to the world's fluidity, before his final decision to give up and just point' (italics mine).

as far as to suggest that there might exist one already available and suitable to the purpose, a way of talking which Theodorus finds 'most appropriate for them' (183b6).⁵⁰

Regrettably, Socrates' proposal at the end of τ78 is not clear, partly because of problems of textual transmission. On the standard edition of the text which I have followed above,⁵¹ the new idiom οὐδ' οὕτως sounds suspiciously too similar to the unacceptable one (μὴ οὕτω) which it should replace.⁵² Silverman suggests that Socrates' point is that the only thing a Heraclitean could do 'is to *respond* "not (even) so" [οὐδ' οὕτως] countless many times to predicates offered up *by someone else* . . . for however long and however many possibilities are offered up': for example, to the question 'Is this stone grey?' the Heraclitean will answer 'not so', to the following question 'Is it white, then?' he will answer again 'not even so', and so on indefinitely for any proposed colour.⁵³ By this purely reactive verbal behaviour, as I have suggested above, the Heraclitean would avoid committing himself to there being a fixed and definite 'grey' or 'white' we can talk of, so Silverman's ingenious proposal on how to interpret the end of τ78 is compatible with my reconstruction of the overall thrust of the argument. The same can be said of Sedley's suggested emendation οὐδέ πως ('not even somehow'), although Sedley himself does not frame it within the kind of interpretation I am defending.⁵⁴ I suggest, tentatively, that we might perhaps attempt some more radical intervention, such as οὐδ' ὅποιονοῦν ('not even qualified in any way whatsoever', 'not at all qualified in some way'), or at least the paleographically less difficult οὐδ' ὅποιον ('not even qualified', 'not at all qualified'). Since on my reading it is the possibility of using predicates that is being banned in τ78, the proposed emendation would be particularly fitting: at 152d3–4 Socrates had explained that according to SD 'you cannot speak correctly of anything . . . as qualified in any way whatsoever (οὐδ' ὅποιονοῦν)', but the following discussion clarifies

⁵⁰ As McCabe suggests, though, 'the οἰκειοτάτη διάλεκτος may be not so much an appropriate way of speaking, as a private or even idiosyncratic one' (2000: 115n90), and thus something certainly unwelcome for the Heracliteans when one thinks of Heraclitus' own condemnation of the 'private understanding' (ἰδίαν φρόνησιν) of the many in fr. 2 (cf. McCabe 2000: 128).

⁵¹ οὐδ' οὕτως μάλιστα ἔν, MS W, followed by Burnet (1900–7: vol. 1) and Hicken (Duke *et al.* 1995); most MSS have οὐδ' ὅπως μάλιστα δ' οὕτως ἔν.

⁵² McDowell (1973: 182) suggests that Socrates is changing his mind and that the qualification 'said in an indefinite sense' is the key: 'to say how things are not is not to say anything *definite* as to how things are', and is thus consistent with extreme flux.

⁵³ Silverman 2000: 149–50. For a partially similar interpretation cf. McCabe 2000: 115: 'this "not at all thus" reflects on some previous stage of the argument: on being offered "thus or not-thus" we reject a determinate choice of either (and so say "not at all thus"). In doing so we move to a higher level of discourse'. That οὐδ' οὕτως is offered as an *answer* seems to be implied both by the context and, as McCabe (2000: 115n91) suggests, by the subsequent use of the term διάλεκτος to refer to it.

⁵⁴ Sedley 2004: 98n11.

that the problem there rested in the use of the verb 'to be', implying non-relative predications, and not in the predicated qualifications themselves; now the Heracliteans would need to make their ban on talking of any quality unconditional, extending it to the sphere of relativised becoming. They can no longer say that a stone becomes white, or qualified in any way whatsoever, for someone; they can only say, in a purely indefinite way (ἄπειρον λεγόμενον), 'not at all qualified', where this is not itself to be taken as a form of definite qualification.⁵⁵

The envisaged possibility, at least theoretical, of adopting some form of expression consistent with the radical SD only strengthens the previous point that our operational (or, perhaps better, quasi-operational) self-refutation has not proved that extreme flux must be false.⁵⁶ As I have remarked in similar cases, however, this is certainly not to suggest that Socrates fears not to have dismissed the Heracliteans effectively enough: their position has been revealed to be in conflict with its actual mode of presentation, extremely difficult, if possible at all, to be communicated in any way, certainly unfit for rational discussion, and obviously unpalatable in all its consequences (including, of course, that extreme reform of parlance it would demand).⁵⁷ The Heracliteans have very little to cheer for the fact that they have not been convicted of absolute self-refutation.

13.3 THE ONE'S TROUBLES (SPH. 244B–D, 249C6–8)

The 'people of Ephesus' are not the only ones to experience serious troubles when trying to articulate their position. The discussion of the opposite party, 'those who say that the all is one and at rest' (183e3–4),⁵⁸ had been envisaged by Socrates in the *Theaetetus* as the necessary counterpart of the examination of extreme flux, but then it had been sidestepped out of respect for the chief exponent of that party, Parmenides, that 'one

⁵⁵ For a completely different interpretation of ἄπειρον λεγόμενον ('said [i.e. negated] infinitely many times') cf. Denyer 1991: 104 and 216n4.

⁵⁶ Contra Barnes 1982a: 69 ('if the theory is true, it cannot even be stated. Hence it is necessarily false'), Baltzly 1999: 175–85, Silverman 2000: 110 ('if everything is in flux, then language is impossible; but language is possible; therefore, it is not the case that everything is in flux'; this is retracted later on pp. 150–1). I shall return in section 13.4 (p. 230) to Baltzly's reasons for affirming that in Plato's eyes this kind of operational self-refutation argument does amount to a definitive falsification of extreme flux.

It is noteworthy that the conclusion of the *Cratylus* (439e–440d), partially parallel to the *Theaetetus* section we have analysed in this chapter, also leaves the possibility open that radical flux is real, despite having already established that, if it were real, knowledge would be impossible (pace Silverman 2001: 34). For analysis of the *Cratylus* section cf. also Barney 2001: 150–5; Sedley 2003: 169–72.

⁵⁷ Cf. McCabe 2000: 138.

⁵⁸ οἱ ἐν ἐστὸς λέγουσι τὸ πᾶν. Cf. 180e3–4 (ἐν τε πάντα ἐστὶ καὶ ἔστηκεν αὐτὸ ἐν αὐτῷ).

being'⁵⁹ . . . venerable and awesome' (183e4–7): a brief digression would not even begin to scratch the surface of the question of what exactly Parmenides meant, while adequate consideration would make Socrates and his friends lose sight of the main thread of their discussion, the definition of knowledge. The analysis of the Parmenidean views will not have to wait long, though. In Plato's dramatic fiction, the day after the conversation portrayed in the *Theaetetus* Socrates again meets Theodorus and Theaetetus, who are accompanied this time by an Eleatic Stranger: the *Sophist* begins. It is when the sophistic denial of the possibility of falsehood comes under scrutiny that 'the great Parmenides' becomes an object of discussion, since his prohibition from saying that what is not is appears to support that denial (237a–b). We shall return in section 13.5 below to the difficulties inherent in the discussion of 'what is not'; at the moment I am interested in the puzzling consequences of the two cornerstones of the Parmenidean conception of being which had been singled out in the *Theaetetus*. The Stranger first tackles the thesis that 'the all is one':

T79 Str.: Shouldn't we do our best to find out from those who say that the all is one (ἐν τὸ πᾶν) what they mean by 'being'?

Tht.: How should we not?

Str.: Then, let them answer this: 'I suppose you say that there is only one.'

'We do', they'll say, won't they?

Tht.: Yes.

Str.: 'Well, then; do you call anything "being"?'

Tht.: Yes.

Str.: 'Is that just what you call "one", using two names for the same thing? Or what?'

Tht.: What answer do they have after this, Stranger?

Str.: It's clear, Theaetetus, that for someone who advances this thesis it's not the easiest thing of all to answer the present question, or any other question whatsoever.

Tht.: How so?

Str.: Surely it's ridiculous (καταγέλαστον) to admit that there are two names when he does not posit anything but one.⁶⁰ (244b6–c9)

⁵⁹ ἓνα ὄντα Παρμενίδην is a pun: Parmenides is identified with the object of his theory (cf. also p. 222n72), just as the Heracliteans had been pictured in perennial movement in conformity with theirs (cf. p. 208).

⁶⁰ ΞΕ. Παρὰ τῶν ἐν τὸ πᾶν λεγόντων ἄρ' οὐ πευστέον εἰς δύναμιν τί ποτε λέγουσι τὸ ὄν; ΘΕΑΙ. Πῶς γὰρ οὐ; ΞΕ. Τόδε τοίνυν ἀποκρινέσθων. Ἐν ποῦ φατε μόνον εἶναι; Φαμὲν γάρ, φήσουσιν. ἢ γάρ; ΘΕΑΙ. Ναί. ΞΕ. Τί δέ; ὄν καλεῖται τι; ΘΕΑΙ. Ναί.

The proposal that 'there is only one', i.e. that only one thing exists (an alleged consequence of 'the all is one'), forces the Parmenideans into ridiculous consequences as soon as it is put under scrutiny: for even granting that 'being' (i.e. the 'is' in 'only one thing *is*') does refer to the same entity to which 'one' refers (otherwise monism would already be dismissed), we still would have *two names* (for that same thing), which is itself treated as incompatible with the brand of radical monism discussed here.⁶¹ The proponents of 'the all is one' are unable to stand by their thesis⁶² when asked to account for it;⁶³ not only is the actual way in which they have presented it incompatible with their thesis, but there is no alternative way of coherently advancing it, since any sentence they may use, by including one distinct subject and one distinct predicate, will be inconsistent with the propositional content it is meant to express. The 'strong monists'⁶⁴ get caught in a ludicrous position, because, however they phrase their thesis, they thereby contradict it implicitly, as testified by their embarrassment when they are asked to grant the consequences of their words openly.⁶⁵ Although Plato does not use any term or phrase suggesting self-refutation, we have found elsewhere a strong element of ridicule tightly associated with self-refuting positions. To recur here to the notion of operational self-refutation, as we have done in section 13.2 above, does not seem

ΞΕ. Πότερον ὅπερ ἔν, ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτῷ προσχρώμενοι δυοῖν ὀνόμασιν, ἢ πῶς;

ΘΕΑΙ. Τίς οὖν αὐτοῖς ἡ μετὰ τοῦτ', ὧ ξένη, ἀπόκρισις;

ΞΕ. Δῆλον, ὦ Θεαίτητε, ὅτι τῷ ταύτην τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ὑποθεμένῳ πρὸς τὸ νῦν ἐρωτηθῆναι καὶ πρὸς ἄλλο δὲ ὁτιοῦν οὐ πάντων ῥᾶστον ἀποκρίνασθαι.

ΘΕΑΙ. Πῶς;

ΞΕ. Τὸ τε δύο ὀνόματα ὁμολογεῖν εἶναι μηδὲν θέμενον πλὴν ἓν καταγέλαστόν που.

⁶¹ Of course one might protest that such a radical form of monism, which does not even admit the existence of two distinct words, is a sheer historical fiction, and thus irrelevant to the discussion of the actual Parmenidean position, but this need not concern us here. According to Palmer (1999: 148–81), the current discussion reflects a sophistic appropriation of Eleaticism which later will be embodied by the 'late-learners' (cf. section 13.4 below) and will drive the first, fourth and sixth deductions of the *Parmenides* (cf. section 13.5 below).

⁶² The Stranger's use of ὑπόθεσις is reminiscent of Socrates' use of the term at *Tht.* 183a10–b5 (178 on p. 214). As McCabe remarks, here ὑπόθεσις does not indicate 'some' hypothetical feature of the Eleatic posit, but its basicness' (2000: 67n32).

⁶³ Actually, they are unable to answer 'any other question whatsoever'. Significantly, the monists are not present at the conversation, just as Protagoras and the Heracliteans were not present in the *Theaetetus*, but the Stranger has suggested that questions should still be asked 'as if they were present' (243d7–8). For thought-provoking emphasis on this point cf. McCabe 2000: 138 and p. 356 below.

⁶⁴ I borrow this label from McCabe 2000: 69. My analysis in this section is much indebted to McCabe's lucid discussion (2000: 60–73), to which I also refer the reader for details concerning the context.

⁶⁵ An accusation similar to the one levelled against the monists in 179 had been previously directed against the dualists: those who say that (only) the hot and the cold are, or propose two other principles of the same kind, are actually proposing either three entities (e.g. hot, cold and being), or, if being is identical with the two other principles, one entity only (243d–244b).

gratuitous,⁶⁶ although Plato's argument is not easily cast into the rigid framework of Mackie's formal analysis.⁶⁷ But what is the exact nature of the 'incoherence' or 'contradiction' into which the monists fall when presenting their thesis? When incoherently asserting an operationally self-refuting proposition, as the monists do, does one thereby end up falsifying it, or does one 'only' commit oneself to contradiction? Since Mackie's operational self-refutation is a broadening of the mechanism of his pragmatic self-refutation to *all* the possible ways of presenting of a certain proposition and, as I have shown in chapter 10, Mackie's pragmatic self-refutation is ambiguous between the two possibilities (strict pragmatic vs. *ad hominem* self-refutation), operational self-refutation inherits the same potential ambiguity. In some cases the operationally self-refuting assertion will falsify its propositional content, in others not (the asserted content and the act of asserting it will be inconsistent, but what is asserted might still be true).⁶⁸ In our present case it seems that proper falsification is at stake, since, according to the argument, by their assertion the monists actually exemplify the existence of more than one word.

One would think that, although the radical monists have proven unable to coherently assert their own position, perhaps they could devise some new, non-self-refuting form of expression for it, just as it was suggested the radical Heracliteans do, or, more plausibly, limit themselves to univocally *naming* their ἔν. The Stranger, however, bars the latter possibility before it can even be envisaged:

τ80 Str.: And it would be completely <ridiculous> to accept that someone said that there is a name, if it has no account.

Tht.: How?

Str.: If he affirms that the name is different from the thing, then surely he mentions two things.

Tht.: Yes.

Str.: And if he affirms that the name is the same as the thing itself, either he will be forced to say that it's a name of nothing, or, if he says that it's <the name> of something, then it will follow that the name is only a name of a name, but of nothing else.

Tht.: That is so.

⁶⁶ For a description of the argument of 179 as an operational self-refutation cf. e.g. Silverman 2002: 153.

⁶⁷ Here no relevant prefixable operator expressing the commitments intrinsic to the speech act of assertion is involved. The problem for the monists resides in the structure of the sentence they must use for their assertion (and for any assertion whatsoever), with distinct subject and predicate terms.

⁶⁸ Note, however, that Mackie himself seems to think of operational self-refutation in the second way only (cf. p. 357n7).

Str.: And <it will follow that> the one is one of one only, and also that the one is of the name.⁶⁹ (244C11–D12)

Not only are the strong monists not allowed to assert anything about their one; they cannot even coherently *name* it, because even so they would contradict their monism (if there must be only one 'something', there cannot be one thing *and* its name). Unless, perhaps, they said that their chosen name, 'one', and the one it names are one and the same thing: but this would amount to dilating the very notion of 'name' beyond any tolerable limit, as showed by the ridiculous consequences to which such a desperate move would be exposed, as spelled out at the end of T80.⁷⁰ With a spectacular twist, Parmenides' one being has been revealed to be completely ineffable, exactly like not-being, as we will learn in section 13.5 below; silence appears as the only coherent option, and the champion of unity and stability, Parmenides, seems to be condemned to the same grim fate as the fanatic of plurality and change, Cratylus, minus the recreation of wagging his finger (cf. section 13.2 above).⁷¹ And this silence should not be confused with the mystical silence of those who claim to reach some mysterious enlightened cognitive state: as McCabe suggests, if thought is a silent speech with oneself, by blocking the function of referring performed by names, 'their theory leaves them [*sc.* the monists] not only with nothing to say, but nothing to think, either' (2000: 71). The silence demanded by their theory would be, after all, the undignified silence of mindless vegetables.⁷²

⁶⁹ ΞΕ. Καὶ τὸ παράπαν γε ἀποδέχεσθαι τοῦ λέγοντος ὡς ἔστιν ὀνομα π, λόγον οὐκ ἂν ἔχον.

ΘΕΑΙ. Πῃ;

ΞΕ. Τιθεῖς τε τοῦνομα τοῦ πράγματος ἕτερον δύο λέγει πού τι.

ΘΕΑΙ. Ναί.

ΞΕ. Καὶ μὴν ἂν ταῦτόν γε αὐτῷ τιθῇ τοῦνομα, ἢ μηδενὸς ὄνομα ἀναγκασθήσεται λέγειν, εἰ δέ τις αὐτὸ φήσει, συμβήσεται τὸ ὄνομα ὀνόματος ὄνομα μόνον, ἄλλου δὲ οὐδενὸς ὄν.

ΘΕΑΙ. Οὐτως.

ΞΕ. Καὶ τὸ ἐν γε ἐνὸς ἐν ὄν μόνον καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν ὄν.

The text is uncertain: I have adopted, as usual, the text printed in the most recent Oxford Classical Texts edition (Duke *et al.* 1995). For a slightly different text and translation, and discussion of various alternatives, cf. McCabe 2000: 68n33.

⁷⁰ What would be needed in order to escape a charge of operational self-refutation could thus be exploited for a *reductio ad absurdum*.

⁷¹ Cf. Seligman 1974: 26.

⁷² Of course, a version of radical monism like the one on the table here would be untenable for countless other reasons (cf. p. 224n79), beginning with the fact that there cannot be more than one monist, condemned to a solipsistic existence, and this one monist must be the same as the one being he believes to exist (the pun signalled on p. 219n59 alludes, then, to a genuine philosophical issue).

This final unspoken (and unspeakable) consequence of the thesis that 'the all is one' explicitly emerges only a few pages later in the *Sophist*, as a consequence of the twin Parmenidean thesis that 'the all is at rest'. In the complete absence of change, 'that which wholly is' would be a wholly lifeless being, devoid of soul, intelligence, and understanding, a frightening prospect according to Theaetetus (248e–249a). Moreover, not only could this resting all never be a subject of (self-)knowledge, but it could not become an object of knowledge either, given that whatever is known, 'insofar as it is known, is changed by having something done to it' (248e2–4). Finally, and more generally, 'it follows that if beings do not change then *nothing* anywhere possesses any intelligence about anything'⁷³ (249b5–6). Immediately afterwards, the Stranger argues that intelligence will also be destroyed 'if we concede that everything is moving and changing' (249b8–10): once again, with a striking *coincidentia oppositorum*, the extremist partisans of universal rest and universal flux are forced in the very same corner.⁷⁴ (This opposition partially overlaps with the famous 'battle of gods and giants' set up at *Sph.* 246a–248a, i.e. with the clash between 'the friends of the forms', who place being in intelligible forms, and materialist thinkers, who identify being with body or – in their reformed incarnations – with anything having some capacity for acting or being acted upon.)⁷⁵ Obviously the consequence that intelligence cannot exist is unpalatable for many reasons, among which the Stranger emphasises the following:

T81 And we must fight with every argument against anyone who, while obscuring knowledge, understanding, or intelligence, insists on anything whatsoever about anything.⁷⁶ (249c6–8)

The argumentative strategy of these lines might be construed as a form of operational self-refutation,⁷⁷ although, again, Plato himself does not adopt the relevant jargon. Certainly we are not in front of the straightforward self-refutation of someone asserting that 'There is no intelligence' or that 'Nothing can be understood': in T81 the denial of knowledge, understanding and intelligence is only the alleged hidden consequence of both

⁷³ συμβαίνει δ' οὖν . . . ἀκινήτων τε ὄντων νοῦν μηδενὶ περὶ μηδενὸς εἶναι μηδαμοῦ.

⁷⁴ Not so surprisingly, if one considers, for example, Heraclitus' 'monism' of fr. 50: 'Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one' (οὐκ ἔμοῦ ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστιν ἐν πάντα εἶναι).

⁷⁵ Although the 'friends of forms' cannot be considered full-blown Parmenideans, starting from the fact that they are pluralists, their forms have Parmenidean features, and their thesis concerning rest is one they share with Parmenides.

⁷⁶ καὶ μὴν πρὸς γε τοῦτον παντὶ λόγῳ μαχετέον, ὅς ἂν ἐπιστήμην ἢ φρόνησιν ἢ νοῦν ἀφανίζων ἰσχυρίζεται περὶ τίνος ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν.

⁷⁷ So Silverman 2002: 155.

the theses that everything is at rest and that everything changes. According to the Stranger, their supporters are unwittingly committed to that denial, but at the same time they incoherently go on making all kinds of assertions, including, crucially, those of their own theses, thus showing that they believe they know what they are saying and displaying their own understanding of being. The very act of making certain assertions is thus inconsistent with the asserted propositional content, by clashing with its ultimate consequences.⁷⁸ The utmost generality of Plato's formulation ('insists on anything whatsoever about anything') suggests, however, that probably in T81 Plato was not thinking primarily of such a self-refutation pattern involving the distinctive theses of 'gods' and 'giants', but, more broadly, of the *pragmatic inconsistency* between what they say, i.e. their theses which destroy the possibility of knowledge, understanding and intelligence, and what they do, i.e. their everyday practice of making assertions in general.

Is the Stranger's argument, however one construes it, intended to be a definitive proof of the falsehood of the two radical theories under examination? Once again, if we stick to the details of Plato's text, the answer seems to be 'no'. The consequences of the positions of both 'gods' and 'giants' have been chastised as 'shameful' (247c1), 'frightful' (249a3) and 'unreasonable' (249b1), but never as 'false'. It is recommended that the philosopher, the person who values knowledge, understanding and intelligence the most, not listen to people who say that being is completely at rest, or that it changes in every way (249c10–d2), thus unwittingly denying the very possibility that those treasured things exist. If we pay close attention to the Stranger's own words, we notice that it is not the falsehood of those theses which must appal the true philosopher: it is the extreme undesirability of the non-philosophical (and indeed non-human) life to which they would lead if coherently followed that requires every effort to fight them. Analogously, in T80 the cognate position according to which 'the all is one' had been reduced to stupid silence or meaningless babbling ('the one is one of one'), but had not been explicitly rejected as false.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ For example, whenever he asserts that everything is at rest, a 'friend of forms' must presuppose that he understands what he is saying, unless he prefers to admit he is merely parroting an assertion; but his alleged understanding conflicts with one necessary consequence of his thesis, and thus, indirectly, with his thesis too. This conflict, however, need not amount to an absolute falsification of that thesis, since the friend of the forms could actually be deluding himself when thinking he understands what he says. If a 'giant' asserts that everything changes, what he does, i.e. making an assertion, reveals his nature to be that of an intelligent being, and thus seems to falsify the asserted thesis (by *modus tollens*, again, by falsifying its consequence that no intelligence is possible).

⁷⁹ *Contra* McCabe 2000: 63. The most the Stranger says is that 'the all is one' is involved in countless difficulties (ἀπορίαι): 'And so countless other issues, each involving indefinitely many difficulties,

13.4 THE 'LATE-LEARNERS' AND THAT WEIRD FELLOW EURYCLES (SPH. 252B–C)

In sections 13.2 and 13.3 above we have examined a number of arguments which it was tempting to construe along the lines of self-refutation, although admittedly Plato himself did not appear interested in that exercise. The passage I shall analyse in this section leaves no doubt as to Plato's intentions, but most commentators have eschewed the difficult task of clarifying the exact logic of his self-refutation charge.

We are still in the *Sophist*, only a few lines after the opposite extremisms of 'gods' and 'giants' concerning change have been revealed to be equally impossible to express coherently. For the discussion to proceed, both change and rest must then be admitted to have some sort of reality, but neither can be identified with being (which appears by now to be involved in no less muddle than not-being); the mutual relations and associations between the three still elude the Stranger and Theaetetus (249d–251a).

A new party of outlandish protagonists enters the scene, composed both of youngsters and of elderly 'late-learners' (ὀψιμαθεῖς) who, blinded by their yet dim understanding, 'enjoy not letting us call a man good, but only the good good and the man man'⁸⁰ on the basis of 'the handy idea that it is impossible for the many to be one and for the one to be many'⁸¹ (251b6–c2). The problem of identifying what historical figures are being mocked by Plato beneath the epithet 'late-learners' has exercised the scholarly skills of many, and it would be unwise to digress into this debate here.⁸² As far as the dialogue's internal economy is concerned, the late-learners can be thought of as the pedantic grandchildren of Parmenides, who either have not fully digested his lesson or, perhaps, have digested it only too well, and unlike Plato himself are eager to follow it unreservedly, right to its extreme consequences, with the naïve enthusiasm typical of neophytes.⁸³

will appear for him who says that the being is two things or only one' (245d12–e2), which is of course itself incompatible with strong monism. I shall return to the question of the relation between operational self-refutation and falsehood on pp. 230–4.

⁸⁰ χαίρουσιν οὐκ ἔχοντες ἀγαθὸν λέγειν ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν ἀγαθόν, τὸν δὲ ἀνθρώπον ἀνθρώπον.

⁸¹ πρόχειρον ὡς ἀδύνατον τὰ τε πολλὰ ἐν καὶ τὸ ἐν πολλὰ εἶναι.

⁸² For an up-to-date overview of various options (Antisthenes, Lycophron, Menedemus and the Eretrians, the Megarians Euclides and Stilpo, the Cynics) favoured in the literature, both ancient and modern, cf. Palmer 1999: 168–9. For the suggestion that the ὀψιμαθεῖς were sophists such as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus cf. Brancacci 1999. For a useful analysis of the relevant views of most of these candidates cf. Denyer 1991: 29–45. For a position similar to that of the late-learners cf. the 'dream theory' of the *Theaetetus* (in particular 201e3–5).

⁸³ Cf. Seligman 1974: 44–5: the late-learners 'present an inverted epitome, as it were, of Plato's criticism of Parmenides. Was Parmenides not entitled to attribute anything whatever to his one being, nay

The late-learners' refusal to apply (προσάπτειν) to anything any name other than its proper one, which concerns their linguistic practice, is treated as a clear symptom of a commitment, not necessarily conscious on their part, to the ontological thesis that 'things'⁸⁴ are unblended (ἄμεικτα) and incapable of having a share of (μεταλαμβάνειν) each other' (251d6–7), and that 'nothing has any capacity at all for association (κοινωνία) with anything' (251e9). The Stranger argues that this thesis, by requiring that change and rest have no kind of commingling (οὐδαμῇ μεθέξετον) with being (251e10), and thus are not (252a2–3), overthrows all the ontological views which had been previously surveyed, those based on rest (Parmenides, the friends of the forms), those imposing change (the materialist giants), and those trying to accommodate both⁸⁵ (e.g. Empedocles) (252a–b). Whether they realise it or not, the late-learners are cheerfully dumping the whole previous history of philosophy in a single breath, which is sufficient to make their position sound rather suspect.⁸⁶ None the less, the worst is yet to come:

T82 Str.: Furthermore, those very people who do not let anything be called something different because of association with the quality of something else will follow the most ridiculous (καταγελαστότατα) theory of all.

Tht.: How so?

Str.: Surely about everything they are forced to use 'is', and 'apart from' and 'the others' and 'by itself', and countless other things. Since they are incapable of abstaining from these, and from weaving (συνάπτειν) them together in their statements, they don't need others to refute them, but

not even give it one name? However, we will see that in the face of Plato's criticism the late-learners seem to be happy at least with naming, if not with some kind of predication. According to Palmer (1999: 167), 'the problem posed by the first critique [of monism, at 244b–d], how one thing can have many names or predicates, is raised again at 251a5 ff., where the Visitor attributed this problem to the "opsimaths" or "late-learners"'. This is not completely exact: the first critique of 'the all is one' (cf. section 13.3 above), was not based, unlike the later critique of the 'late-learners', on the fact that, if strong monism were true, we could not have two names for the same thing, but on the simpler point that we could not have two names at all (and actually not even one name for something else).

⁸⁴ Throughout the passage Plato does not specify what these 'things' are; later they seem to be referred to as 'kinds' (γένη, e.g. 253b9), 'forms' (εἶδη, e.g. 253d1) and 'ideas' (ιδέαι, e.g. 253d5), apparently interchangeably. I shall try to keep my description of the late-learners' thesis as general as possible here, as Plato does.

⁸⁵ Cf. 242c–243a.

⁸⁶ This objection can be easily strengthened: as Heinaman (1982–3: 184) observes, 'the hypothesis that no Forms combine only too obviously entails that any theory whatever is false, since any theory asserts that something exists and hence asserts that Being combines with something else' (italics mine).

having the proverbial enemy in their own household and ready to oppose them, they always go carrying him around while he mutters inside, like the weird Eurycles.⁸⁷ (252b8–c9)

These people are not only wildly revisionary ontologists: they are clearly stuck in a *ridiculous* position, no less than those whom they are implicitly fighting. And, yet again, the reason why they are so ridiculous turns out to be (this time explicitly) that they refute themselves. Whenever they proclaim, for example, that 'rest is apart from the other things (e.g. change and being), by itself', they are thereby attaching a number of different 'names' to rest ('is', 'apart from', 'other things', 'by itself'), and weaving them together in their statement, as if rest did in fact have some share and commingling with the things referred to by those terms (e.g. being, apartness, otherness). The way the late-learners formulate their own thesis spectacularly conflicts with the propositional content of the thesis itself;⁸⁸ but precisely what kind of conflict, and consequently what type of self-refutation, is involved?⁸⁹ I suggest that the Stranger's charge operates on two distinct levels, corresponding to the two different aspects of the thesis under attack, linguistic and ontological, which I have disentangled above. At the linguistic level, the late-learners' thesis consists in a prohibition on doing something, i.e. calling any *F* anything other than 'F'. It is not transparent whether this amounts 'only' to a ban on ordinary predication and statement-making ('the man is good'), to be replaced with tautological statements ('the man is man'),⁹⁰ or to a prohibition of predication altogether in favour of simple naming.⁹¹ Although the latter reading seems more plausible, since the use

⁸⁷ ΞΕ. Ἐτι τοῖνυν ἂν αὐτοὶ πάντων καταγελαστότατα μετίοιεν τὸν λόγον οἱ μηδὲν ἑῶντες κοινωνία παθήματος ἑτέρου θάτερον προσαγορεύειν.

ΘΕΑΙ. Πῶς;

ΞΕ. Τῷ τε εἶναι πονεῖν περὶ πάντα ἀναγκάζονται χρῆσθαι καὶ τῷ χωρὶς καὶ τῷ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ τῷ καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ μυρίοις ἑτέροις, ὧν ἀκρατεῖς ὄντες εἰργασθαι καὶ μὴ συνάπτειν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις οὐκ ἄλλων δέονται τῶν ἐξελεγχόντων, ἀλλὰ τὸ λεγόμενον οἴκοθεν τὸν πολέμιον καὶ ἐναντιωσόμενον ἔχοντες, ἐντὸς ὑποφθηγόμενον ὥσπερ τὸν ἄτοπον Εὐρυκλέα περιφέροντες αἰεὶ πορεύονται.

⁸⁸ Contra Seligman (1974: 48): 'the linguistic practice of the "late learners" which the Stranger has in mind seems to be common-sense talk ("speaking of anything") rather than the enunciation of their own theory, though it would apply to that as well'. The Stranger's choice of the words the late-learners are forced to use clearly indicates an attempt to express their own thesis, as I have suggested. This is not to deny that language in general is inconsistent with the complete dissociation of each thing from everything else, as the Stranger will remark later (259e–260b).

⁸⁹ Most commentators recognise that the thesis is shown to be self-refuting (cf. e.g. Ackrill 1971: 204, Heinaman 1982–3: 177, Pelletier 1990: 36, McCabe 1994a: 221, Baltzly 1996: 153, Palmer 1999: 168) or self-contradicting (cf. e.g. Cornford 1935: 258, Bluck 1975: 109, Dorter 1994: 151, Notomi 1999: 233), but very few examine the logic of this self-refutation or self-contradiction.

⁹⁰ Cf. e.g. Cornford 1935: 254. ⁹¹ Cf. e.g. Moravcsik 1962: 59, Bluck 1975: 109.

of the copula 'is' in 'the man is man' could be construed as an intolerable violation of the rule 'one thing, one name', the success of this first layer of the self-refutation charge does not depend on it; clearly, when asserting that 'rest is apart from the other things, by itself', the late-learners break their own veto, by doing much more than simply naming rest or stating its self-identity. But their linguistic prohibition was rooted, we have seen, in ontological ground, and thus formulated at the beginning of T82 ('do not let anything be called something different *because* of association with the quality of something else'): you must not weave different words together into a single statement because in fact the things named by those words do not blend together.⁹² Therefore, when the late-learners do combine various words by asserting 'rest is apart from the other things, all by itself, *so* don't call it by any other name', not only are they disobeying the very order they are formulating by formulating it, but at the same time they are unwittingly committing themselves to the denial of its underlying ontology: for their assertion to be true, rest should have some kind of communion with, or participation in, being and apartness. At this second level the charge resembles a form of *ad hominem* self-refutation: that the late-learners weave words together *as if* the things referred to were mingled together does not establish that those things are indeed mingled together, and thus does not falsify the asserted propositional content, but commits them to contradiction.⁹³ Notice the difference between the Stranger's *ad hominem* strategy, and the different kind of absolute self-refutation argument, based on *Consequentia Mirabilis*, which one *could* have adopted (but clearly Plato is not adopting in T82): 'if (*p*) rest is apart from everything else, all by itself, then it participates in being and apartness; but if rest participates in being and apartness, then (not-*p*) rest is not apart from everything else, all by itself; therefore (not-*p*) rest is not (and cannot be) apart from everything else, all by itself'.

Denyer (1991: 162–3) discards something similar to my *ad hominem* self-refutation reading of T82 in favour of the following construal:

the very *logos* with which Plato's opponents contradict him is itself a combination of just the sort that it says does not happen: if his opponents are to make this statement – or any other statement – they must themselves join together some of the very things that they say are always separated. That at any rate seems to be a more natural reading of this passage: it does justice to the fact that Plato here speaks of 'joining together', applying that expression to words; it has Plato argue simply from the fact that his opponents' *logos* exists, rather than from the

⁹² Cf. Heinaman 1982–3: 177–8. ⁹³ Cf. Seligman 1974: 48–9.

hypothesis that their *logos* is true; it gives pride of place, as Plato's own phrasing does, to the words 'being' and 'apart', rather than to the non-linguistic kinds Being and Apart; and it has Plato's opponents refuted by an actual interrelation of kinds which they themselves involuntarily produce, rather than by a hypothetical interrelation which, if what they say were true, would take place somewhere else.

Denyer is clearly suggesting that in T82 the late-learners' thesis is proved to be false by pragmatic self-refutation in the stricter sense I have distinguished in chapter 10. But this proposal does not keep sufficiently distinct the two aspects of the late-learners' position which I have identified and, consequently, the two levels at which Plato's self-refutation argument operates. That position is the combination of a descriptive ontology and a prescriptive 'linguistics' in harmony with it; by violating the prescription you do not prove the description false, but you unwittingly deny it. Denyer wants the latter aspect to collapse into the former by treating linguistic items as themselves part of the ontology of 'kinds' which they name, and so the combination of words into statements as a genuine instance of communion or commingling of 'kinds'. It seems to me, however, that this is not the most natural reading of Plato's own manoeuvre, since the verbs he uses to indicate linguistic 'weaving' (including συνάπτειν in T82) are consistently different from those indicating ontological blending and participation: the former are transitive ('*x* weaves (words) *y* and *z* together'), the latter intransitive ('(things) *y* and *z* are blended', '*y* participates in *z*').

My reference above to *ad hominem* self-refutation should not be misinterpreted. It is not some specific, ill-conceived and avoidable way which the late-learners choose to formulate their view that is responsible for their demise; *any way* of asserting that view will condemn them, if any assertion must link together at least two different words (and thus two different signified things). For example, even if the late-learners tried to convey their point indirectly, rather than state it, by asserting series of self-identities ('man is man, good is good, rest is rest . . .') or non-identities ('man is not good, rest is not change, change is not rest . . .'), they would probably be still liable to the charge of inconsistency on the grounds that the use of the copula 'is' in 'the man *is* man' is already a violation of the rule 'one thing, one name'. One might suggest that the late-learners could devise some completely non-assertoric way of expressing or alluding to that thesis without incoherence, for example by proposing lists such as 'man man, good good, rest rest, change change . . .' (by dropping the copula, they would elude the difficulty of having 'being' explicitly thrown into the mixture). But this does not seem to be a safe harbour for the late-learners after all:

one can still object that if things do not associate at least with being, then they do not exist at all, so there does not remain any man, good, rest or change to name either (this is in fact the same strategy as we have found used at 251e–252b to prove the incompatibility of the late-learners' thesis with all ontologies). It is true, however, that by giving up assertoric speech and adopting the extremely revisionary and restrictive linguistic behaviour suggested above the late-learners would at least eschew the charge of overt inconsistency between their utterances and the theory these are intended to express.

Upon reflection, then, it is the non-contingent flaw of operational self-refutation that afflicts the late-learners' position: there is *no way* of coherently asserting the ontology underlying their linguistic reform ('they are incapable of abstaining from these words'). Silence seems to be the only coherent option for them.⁹⁴ I have maintained in similar cases that this cannot amount *by itself* to demonstration of the *falsehood* or impossibility of that ontology. However, it has been suggested by some interpreters that it certainly *implies* as much for Plato. Baltzly is a particularly explicit and refined supporter of this view:

Someone who, like Plato, is convinced that philosophical conversation is an important pathway to truth will of course be very mindful of the pre-suppositions of the possibilities of thought and discourse. When the content of a claim [*T*] is such that, were it true, it couldn't be expressed, this is ample reason to think that it must be false. Such a self-refutation argument allows the denial of *T* to be established unhypothetically. (1996: 153)

Let us consider why, according to Baltzly, operational self-refutation should represent for Plato 'ample reason' to conclude that the self-refuting thesis is false and proclaim the 'unhypothetical' truth of its contradictory:

'Why ought we to think that the world is such that what is true of it can be expressed?' Plato's view is that such a world [*sc.* one in which some truths cannot be thought of and expressed coherently] would not be optimally good. The inference from 'if *T* is true, then *T* cannot be expressed' to 'not *T*' requires such an

⁹⁴ For an analogous position which is similarly condemned to silence (and mocked by Plato for this reason) cf. *Euthd.* 303d7–e4: 'whenever you [*sc.* Dionysodorus and Euthydemus] say that no thing is fine or good or white or anything else like that, or in general different from other things, actually you completely sew up the mouths of men, as you speak; but since you seem not only to sew up those of the others, but also your own, this is very graceful and removes the offensiveness of your words' (ὁπόταν φῆτε μήτε καλὸν εἶναι μηδὲν μήτε ἀγαθὸν πρᾶγμα μήτε λευκὸν μηδ' ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων μηδὲν, μηδὲ τὸ παράπαν ἑτέρων ἕτερον, ἀτεχνῶς μὲν τῷ ὄντι συρράπτετε τὰ στόματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὥσπερ καὶ φατέ· ὅτι δ' οὐ μόνον τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, ἀλλὰ δόξατε ἂν καὶ τὰ ὑμέτερα αὐτῶν, τοῦτο πάνυ χαρίεν τέ ἐστιν καὶ τὸ ἐπαχθὲς τῶν λόγων ἀφαιρεῖται). For discussion of the passage and its context cf. McCabe 1998: 156–61.

assumption about the match between reality and thought or language. The Good is for Plato the principle that warrants such optimism since it is the principle which gives being and intelligibility to the intelligible realm. (1996: 157)

According to Baltzly, when in the *Republic* (vi, 510b4–9, 511b3–c2; vii, 533c7–d1) Plato explains that the method of dialectic, unlike that of mathematics, consists in starting from ὑποθέσεις, assumed not as principles but, literally, as 'hypotheses', as 'stepping stones to take off from', and, destroying (ἀναιρεῖν) them, ascending to an unhypothetical (ἀνυπόθετος) first principle, what he has in mind is exactly that procedure of operational self-refutation which Socrates uses against the extreme flux theorists in the *Theaetetus* and the Stranger against the late-learners in the *Sophist*.⁹⁵ The hypotheses that 'everything changes in every way' and 'things do not blend in any way' are assumed for dialectical scrutiny, shown to be operationally self-refuting, and thereby 'destroyed', i.e. falsified, so that their contradictories are established as unhypothetical truths.

If correct, Baltzly's contention would be of momentous significance for our study of ancient self-refutation: no less a thinker than Plato would have assigned to self-refutation arguments the place of honour at the heart of his mature philosophical method of dialectic, making of them the single most important tool in philosophical inquiry. Unfortunately, I believe that the kernel of Baltzly's ingenious proposal does not survive careful scrutiny. I shall list a set of objections which, at least collectively if not individually, appear to me insurmountable:⁹⁶

- (1) in the *Republic* Plato seems to refer to only *one* unhypothetical principle, while Baltzly's interpretation requires the existence of more than one, and possibly many;
- (2) the unhypothetical first principle of the *Republic* appears to be the form of the Good (although, admittedly, nowhere is this explicitly stated),⁹⁷ and so does not coincide with any of the conclusions of Plato's operational self-refutation arguments;

⁹⁵ Baltzly also refers to *Prmd.* 142a1–8, which I shall analyse in the next section (185). We have seen in part 1, chapter 5 (p. 89) that Baltzly interprets similarly Aristotle's elenctic proof of PNC in *Metaphysics* Γ 4 as an operational self-refutation of Antiphrasis' denial of PNC based on a clear Platonic legacy.

⁹⁶ Some of these objections are envisaged by Baltzly himself in the Postscript to Baltzly 1996 (157–9), but I found most of his replies ultimately unconvincing. For insightful criticism of Baltzly's proposal cf. also Bailey 2006: 111–19.

⁹⁷ For a recent account of the role of the form of the Good as the unhypothetical starting point of all that is teleologically explicable, including mathematical forms, cf. Denyer 2007; for recent critical discussion of the standard assumption that the form of the Good is the unhypothetical first principle cf. Seel 2007.

- (3) if the epistemological optimism which allows us to reject operationally self-refuting hypotheses as absolutely false is warranted by the form of the Good and the related teleological presuppositions, then the theses established are not *completely* unhypothetical after all;
- (4) the unhypothetical existence of the form of the Good cannot be concluded through an operational self-refutation argument without vicious circularity, because any such argument relies, on Baltzly's account, on the prior assumption of the Good itself;
- (5) if, consequently, the form of the Good is unique 'in that the cognitive approach appropriate to it is fundamentally different from the way we come to know the other Forms', as Baltzly (1996: 158–9) is forced to postulate as a possible solution, then what has commonly been identified by the readers of the *Republic* as *the ἀνυπόθετος* principle turns out to be unhypothetical for reasons and in ways completely different from all the other 'unhypotheticals';
- (6) in the passages allegedly showing his dialectical method *par excellence* at work, such as T79 and T82, one would have expected Plato to offer some hint that the truth of first principles has just been established beyond doubt; clearly, however, this is not what we were able to observe in our analysis;
- (7) connectedly, in these passages one would have expected much more emphasis on the importance of the method employed, whereas the stress is consistently laid, negatively, on the weakness and utter ludicrousness of the refuted positions;
- (8) on Baltzly's account, the hypotheses used in dialectic must *all* turn out to be false, by operational self-refutation, with a questionable literal interpretation of Plato's claim that the hypotheses are 'destroyed'.⁹⁸ According to what has probably become the standard interpretation, the hypotheses are destroyed only *qua hypotheses*, because at the end of the dialectical process they become fully justified and understood in the light of the unhypothetical principle (their hypothetical character is destroyed).⁹⁹ Alternatively, Bailey (2006: 119–25) has recently suggested

⁹⁸ For a similarly literal interpretation cf. e.g. Gonzales 1998: 238–9 (for useful overview and critical discussion of the main exegetical options concerning the 'destruction of hypotheses' in the *Republic* cf. Gonzales 1998: 209–44). Baltzly's (1999: 195) remark that the verb ἀναιρεῖν is used in the same way by Aristotle in *Metaph.* Γ 4, 1006a26 (the last sentence of T22 on p. 87) is difficult to square with his interpretation of the self-refutation procedure: in that passage the denial of PNC is charged with destroying rational discourse (λόγον), and not with destroying *itself* by making rational discourse impossible.

⁹⁹ Cf. e.g. Robinson 1953: 160–2, Annas 1981: 287. It should be noted that Baltzly himself is also committed to this understanding of ἀναιρεῖν: by destroying (i.e. falsifying) the self-refuting hypothesis, we thereby also destroy the hypothetical character of *its contradictory*, which thus becomes unhypothetical (1996: 133).

that we do not need to interpret what happens to the hypotheses as an elimination in this loose sense either, since in Plato (unlike Aristotle) ἀναιρεῖν never carries the meaning of 'destroy' or 'eliminate', but that of 'take up'. Repunctuating Burnet's text at 533c7–d1, with no comma after ἀναιροῦσα, 'dialectic is the only method that proceeds in this way, *taking up* hypotheses to the principle itself so that they may be firmly established'.¹⁰⁰ Whether we stick to the traditional interpretation of the meaning of ἀναιροῦσα or we endorse Bailey's ingenious proposal, it seems difficult to accept Baltzly's understanding of the falsification of all the hypotheses of dialectic;

- (9) Plato's image of the hypotheses as stepping stones in a complex ascent towards the first principle also appears hard to reconcile with Baltzly's requirement that the unhypothetical first principles are simply the contradictories of the 'destroyed' hypotheses. On Baltzly's reading there do not seem to be any intermediate steps between those hypotheses and the corresponding unhypothetical first principles: the former are sufficient to establish, by refuting themselves, the latter (in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* passages the whole ascent would be completed, quite cheaply, within a few lines of relatively simple self-refutation argument).¹⁰¹

It is not possible, thus, to subscribe to Baltzly's emphasis on the central role of operational self-refutation arguments in Platonic dialectic. There is, none the less, an indisputable point which can be salvaged from Baltzly's proposal. Operational self-refutation arguments can be considered powerful dismissals of the self-refuting theses precisely because we do operate with the presupposition, or at least the desideratum, that reality must be, at least in some measure, intelligible and a possible object of rational discussion; otherwise, all efforts of philosophical inquiry would be pointless. I do not doubt that, in some measure, Plato did share this presupposition, and that this is the reason why he consistently appears comfortable with the results of his self-refutation manoeuvres, and never asks the portentous question 'what if reality, in all its unintelligibility, does indeed require our silence?'¹⁰² However, this is very different from conjecturing that this sort of underlying presupposition was elevated by Plato to the status of an *explicit* and pivotal principle used to establish, in conjunction with self-refutation manoeuvres, the basic truths and falsehoods about reality.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ ἡ διαλεκτικὴ μέθοδος μόνη ταύτη πορεύεται, τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀναιροῦσα ἐπ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἀρχὴν ἵνα βεβαιώσῃται.

¹⁰¹ Pace Bailey 2006: 113 ('sophisticated arguments').

¹⁰² On the very legitimacy of this question cf. Boyle, Grisez and Tollefsen 1976: 137–8.

¹⁰³ Once made explicit, the presupposition of the intelligibility and communicability of reality would have found eager critics: just think of Gorgias' arguments in *On What Is Not* (cf. p. 238n119). At

Since the latter conjecture does not find corroboration in the Platonic texts, I believe that we should limit ourselves to registering the purpose that Plato explicitly attributes to the self-refutation arguments that we have analysed: silencing his extremist opponents and showing to everyone else how undesirable and ridiculous their position is.

There remains now to be examined the way in which in T82 Plato masterfully pictures the logic of self-refutation through the two connected images of the household enemy and the weird¹⁰⁴ Eurycles. Before explaining their significance, a quick introduction of Eurycles is needed. From the little we can gather from our scanty evidence,¹⁰⁵ it seems that he performed as a private oracular prophet and that in this practice he had perfected a peculiar technique: the prophecy itself was pronounced not through his mouth, but by a second voice, believed to have daemonic or divine origin, coming from inside him, supposedly from the region of his stomach or abdomen. Eurycles must have been a renowned figure in this particular trade (probably its founder) if we judge by the fact that both Aristophanes and Plato mention him, and for some time the whole category of oracular prophets using the same technique – the ‘belly-talkers’ (ἐγγαστριμύθοι), ‘belly-diviners’ (ἐγγαστριμάντις) or ‘chest-diviners’ (στέρνομάντις)¹⁰⁶ – were known as ‘Eurycleses’ or ‘Eurycleans’.¹⁰⁷

As we have seen, the late-learners refute themselves whenever they try to articulate their position, so that no intervention from outside is needed to cause them trouble; equally, the enemy is, proverbially, already inside the household, and Eurycles’ prophetic voice comes from within.¹⁰⁸ Plato’s

Resp. VII, 534b–c we are told that surviving all refutations is a necessary condition for knowledge, but not that it is a sufficient condition for truth.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Marvellous’, ‘extraordinary’ might be equally correct translations for ἄτοπρον here, but of course they would need to be taken with a certain dose of sarcasm.

¹⁰⁵ Apart from T82, cf. Aristoph. *Vesp.* 1019, Plut. *Def. Orac.* 414E and some *scholia* to Plato’s and Aristophanes’ passages. On Eurycles cf. Dodds 1951: 71–2, Connor 2000: 49–51, Ogden 2002: 30–1.

¹⁰⁶ Dodds points out that these people were not ‘ventriloquists in the modern sense of the term, as is often assumed’, and suggests the comparison with utterances made in some kind of trance condition (1951: 71–2). I do not agree with Dodds that ὑποφθεγγόμενον is best translated here as ‘carrying on a dialogue’, instead of ‘speaking in an undertone’ (1951: 89n49): there is no evidence that Eurycles’ technique involved a dialogue between himself and his divine inner voice (cf. also the occurrence of ὑποφθεγγεσθαι in Plut. *Def. Orac.* 414E5), although some such kind of interaction cannot be excluded. Ogden believes that both Aristophanes’ and Plato’s passages ‘make it clear that the original Eurycles was a possessing demon, not a host’ (2000: 31); it seems to me, on the contrary, that both passages are indeterminate enough to leave the possibility open that ‘Eurycles’ was in fact the name of the host, which is certainly how later readers interpreted them.

¹⁰⁷ At Plutarch’s time this name had been outshone by ‘Pythons’, presumably in honour of some later prominent practitioner of this art.

¹⁰⁸ For an image partially reminiscent of both similes of T82 cf. Pl. *Hp. Ma.* 304c–e.

similes stress that aspect of *reflexivity* that we would expect to be involved in any *self-refutation* (as opposed to any simple refutation). However, at the same time they also manage to emphasise the crucial point that the self-effacing unit, for example the statement ‘rest is apart from the other things, by itself’, actually possesses a kind of *internal complexity* which should not escape notice: a single household shelters both its legitimate master and his concealed enemy, who in a sense is, and in another sense is not, part of the household; the one person known as Eurycles possesses a normal, human voice but also another, superhuman voice, which in a sense is, and in another sense is not, Eurycles’ voice. It is this inner duality which creates the very possibility of self-refutation:¹⁰⁹ for self-refutation turns out to be the fight of one part, or aspect, of the unit against the other one. The legitimate master of the household is fought by the enemy he himself has hosted unknowingly: it is not difficult to see that the corresponding dualism in the late-learners’ statement is between the content of their assertion and the way it is formulated. In Eurycles’ case the parallel is not perfect, since as far as we know the voice inside him did not contradict Eurycles’ normal pronouncements (although such a dramatic performance cannot be ruled out). The two parts of the whole do not have, however, the same status: just as there are a legitimate master and a concealed enemy in the household, and a normal loud voice and an extraordinary one muttering inside in Eurycles, in the late-learners’ statements there are an *overt* propositional content and *implicit* presuppositions and consequences of the way that content is asserted. The enemy, being concealed, will be difficult to spot, and the divine prophecies, being uttered in an undertone, will probably not be easy to hear and understand; equally, the implications of the late-learners’ statements, clashing with their theory, perhaps will not immediately be loud and clear (certainly not to the late-learners themselves), but this does not mean that they are less dangerous than the enemy’s sword or less true than the divine voice’s prophecies.

It is remarkable how many details about the logic of his self-refutation argument Plato manages to pack in a few words through his well-chosen similes and without relying on technical jargon or analysis. One final achievement of Plato’s art is worth our applause: with its vividness Eurycles’ simile succeeds in recalling and strengthening the Stranger’s initial opinion that the theory discussed is most bizarre, by illustrating how bizarre and ridiculous it is bound to be; the image of the household enemy, by contrast,

¹⁰⁹ In part I, chapter 2, I have argued against the plausibility of analyses of absolute self-refutation which seem to allow for self-refutation even in the absence of any internal complexity of the self-refuting item.

adds to the picture a stroke of tragedy which is not out of place, since from their very introduction the late-learners had been portrayed as somehow tragicomic characters.

13.5 THE INEFFABLE INEFFABILITY OF WHAT IS NOT: PLATO (*SPH.* 238C–239B, *PRMD.* 142A) AND THE PLATONIST TRADITION

In section 13.3 above I anticipated that the conclusion that it is impossible to coherently assert that ‘the all is one’ (τ79), or to name this one being (τ80), represented a particularly interesting twist: Parmenides’ being surprisingly turned out to meet the same fate which, according to Parmenides himself, is to be reserved for not-being. Let us now examine how, only a few pages earlier in the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger had articulated Parmenides’ renowned stance on what is not, and shown that it is not exempt from difficulties.

The possibility of false speaking or believing, which must be vindicated if an adequate definition of the sophist and his activity is to be attained, seems to be at odds, according to the Stranger, with Parmenides’ celebrated admonition ‘never let this prevail, that that which is not is’ (237a8),¹¹⁰ which in turn is said to reflect the way we ordinarily speak (236d–237b). For, to begin with, phrases such as ‘what in no way is’ (τὸ μηδὲν ὄν) and ‘what is not’ (τὸ μὴ ὄν) cannot be applied to any of the things which are or, consequently, to something at all: whoever utters them is not talking about nothing, but is saying nothing at all, or at least nothing meaningful (237c–e). Secondly, not only is it impossible to predicate ‘what is not’ of anything, but, conversely, none of the things which are can ever belong to what is not, since what is can only belong to some other of the things that are (we might gloss, adopting the language used some pages later in the *Sophist*, that what is and what is not do not blend at all). But since numbers are things which are, and unity and plurality are numbers, one should say (or silently think within oneself) neither ‘what is not’ (μὴ ὄν), in the singular, nor ‘the things which are not’ (μὴ ὄντα), in the plural, because otherwise one would be already attaching something which is (number) to what is not (238a–c). The conclusion is obvious:

τ83 Do you understand, then, that it’s impossible to utter, say or think correctly what is not itself by itself, but it’s unthinkable (ἀδιανόητον), unsayable (ἄρρητον), unutterable (ἄφθεγκτον), and unspeakable (ἄλογον)?¹¹¹ (*Sph.* 238c8–11)

¹¹⁰ οὐ γὰρ μὴ ποτε τοῦτο δαμῇ... εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα. (=DK28B7, 1)

¹¹¹ συνονοεῖς οὐν ὡς οὔτε φθέγγασθαι δυνατόν ὁρθῶς οὔτ’ εἰπεῖν οὔτε διανοηθῆναι τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, ἀλλ’ ἔστιν ἀδιανόητόν τε καὶ ἄρρητον καὶ ἀφθεγκτον καὶ ἄλογον;

We can easily appreciate how close this outcome is to that of the argument against radical monism. But while that outcome would have been most disturbing for the historical Parmenides,¹¹² it seems that we are here fully within Parmenidean orthodoxy:

τ84 For neither could you know what is not (for it is impossible), nor could you mention it.¹¹³ (DK28B2, 7–8)

After all, these notorious lines can be considered, together with the equally famous prohibition from saying that what is not is (237a8),¹¹⁴ the historical spring of that puzzle about the possibility of falsehood which is so worrying for the Stranger here and for Plato in so many of his works.

Before proceeding, it is worth considering how an analogous conclusion is reached at the end of the first deduction of the dialectical exercise in the *Parmenides*, in which a one is hypothesised whose character is fully exhausted by its being a bare unity, with no share in any form of plurality. Starting from this hypothesis, the character Parmenides infers that the one neither is a whole nor has parts, is unlimited, shapeless, nowhere, neither at rest nor in motion, neither different from nor the same as itself or something else, neither like nor unlike itself or something else, neither equal nor unequal (e.g. greater or less) than itself or something else; the one is not in time either, and therefore ‘has no share of being at all’ (οὐδαμῶς τὸ ἐν οὐσίᾳ μετέχει) and so ‘in no way is’ (οὐδαμῶς ἔστι τὸ ἐν) or ‘is one’ (*Prmd.* 137c–141e). Once the bare one of the *Parmenides*’ first deduction has magically transformed into ‘what in no way is’ of our *Sophist* passage (it does not matter here how plausible the transformation is),¹¹⁵ Parmenides can carry on his interrogation of his interlocutor, a certain young Aristotle, as follows:

τ85 Parm.: If something is not, could anything belong to this thing which is not, or be of it?

Arist.: And how could it?

¹¹² Cf., however, p. 220n61.

¹¹³ οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τὸ γε μὴ ἔόν (οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν) οὔτε φράσαις. Cf. also DK28B6, 1.

¹¹⁴ Cf. n. 110 above.

¹¹⁵ Parmenides’ own qualification ‘if such an account as this is to be trusted’ (141e12–13) might suggest that the answer is ‘not much’ (for discussion of this issue cf. Palmer 1999: 154–8). It is worth noting that the first deduction of the *Parmenides* might have been described as a damning reversal of ‘the one is’ into ‘the one is not (in any way)’; Plato, however, does not seem to be interested in making this point, but immediately goes on to draw further problematic consequences (cf. τ85 below). Proclus (*in Prmd.* 6.1241, 25–8) signals this possible argument: ‘the most ridiculous thing of all was to say straight from the beginning “if the one is, the one is not”: for this very thesis seemed to eliminate itself (πάντων οὖν γελοιότατον ἦν εὐθύς ἐξ ἀρχῆς λέγειν εἰ ἔστι τὸ ἐν, οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἐν αὐτὸς γὰρ ἂν ἐαυτὸν ἔδοξεν ἀναιρεῖν ὁ λόγος).

Parm.: Therefore, no name belongs to it, nor is there any account or any knowledge or perception or opinion of it (οὐδ' ἄρα ὄνομα ἔστιν αὐτῷ οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδὲ τις ἐπιστήμη οὐδὲ αἴσθησις οὐδὲ δόξα).

Arist.: Apparently not.

Parm.: Therefore, it's not named or spoken of, nor is it the object of opinion or knowledge (οὐδ' ὀνομάζεται ἄρα οὐδὲ λέγεται οὐδὲ δοξάζεται οὐδὲ γινώσκεται), nor do any of the things which are perceive it.

Arist.: It seems not.

Parm.: Is it possible then that things are so concerning the one?

Arist.: I certainly don't think so.¹¹⁶ (*Prmd.* 142a1–8)

Although the sets of phrases and adjectives used in T83 and T85 do not coincide, both the intended conclusions and the rationale leading to them match perspicuously.¹¹⁷ In the *Parmenides*, however, unlike the *Sophist*, the homonymous protagonist rhetorically suggests that the conclusion is impossible,¹¹⁸ and his interlocutor agrees, but neither takes care to explain why this is the case. Is the problem, quite simply, that a mix of non-existence, ineffability and unknowability is not what you would expect and accept as part of a correct account of *the one* ('Is it possible then that things are so concerning the one?'),¹¹⁹ while it might be acceptable, and indeed necessary, for what is absolutely not, as Parmenides' poem taught us? This

¹¹⁶ Ὅ δὲ μὴ ἔστι, τούτῳ τῷ μὴ ὄντι εἴη ἂν τι αὐτῷ ἢ αὐτοῦ;

Καὶ πῶς;

Οὐδ' ἄρα ὄνομα ἔστιν αὐτῷ οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδὲ τις ἐπιστήμη οὐδὲ αἴσθησις οὐδὲ δόξα.

Οὐ φαίνεται.

Οὐδ' ὀνομάζεται ἄρα οὐδὲ λέγεται οὐδὲ δοξάζεται οὐδὲ γινώσκεται, οὐδὲ τι τῶν ὄντων αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεται.

Οὐκ ἔοικεν.

Ἦ δυνατόν οὖν περὶ τὸ ἐν ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχειν;

Οὐκ οἶμαι δοκεῖ.

¹¹⁷ Both the *Sophist's* absolute not-being and the *Parmenides'* bare one are characterised by a complete lack of any share in being. The same is the case for the *Sophist's* 'only one' (T79 on p. 219).

¹¹⁸ For a different interpretation of the final lines of T85 cf. Rickless 2007: 134–5: 'nothing requires that "these things" be read as anaphoric on the derived results: "these things" could also be read as referring back to the properties of being named, being spoken of, and, importantly, being one'. This reading seems to me unacceptably strained, and fails to explain Aristotle's two very different replies ('It seems not' and 'I certainly don't think so') to what would be, essentially, the same question.

¹¹⁹ Palmer (1999: 108–17) interestingly points out that both the argumentative pattern and the conclusions of the *Parmenides'* first deduction have a strong Gorgianic flavour. Note, however, that whereas not-being, unknowability and incommunicability are presented as coordinated features in T85, in the *Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος* (*On What Is Not*) they are put forward by Gorgias with his characteristic *concessive* pattern: nothing exists; even if it existed, it would be unknowable and unthinkable; even if it were knowable and thinkable, it would be incommunicable to anyone else (cf. DK82B3).

seems to be the correct answer,¹²⁰ but let us now resume our analysis of the *Sophist's* passage, which will also suggest an alternative reading for the conclusion of T85. The Stranger claims that there is a still greater difficulty to mention than the one just emerged in T83:

T86 Str.: Don't you understand from the very things we have said that what is not puts even the one who is refuting it in such an *aporia* that whenever someone tries to refute (ἐλέγχειν) it he is forced to say about it things contrary to himself (ἐναντία αὐτὸν αὐτῷ περὶ ἐκεῖνο ἀναγκάζεσθαι λέγειν)?

Tht.: How do you mean? Say it more clearly.

Str.: You ought not to look for more clarity from me. For I was the one who advanced the thesis that what is not should not share either in oneness or in plurality, but both earlier and right now I have been speaking of it as one, since I say 'what is not'. You understand?

Tht.: Yes.

Str.: And again also a little while ago I said that it is unutterable (ἄφθεγκτόν), unsayable (ἄρητον) and unspeakable (ἄλογον). Do you follow me?

Tht.: I follow, of course.

Str.: So in trying to attach 'is' (εἶναι) wasn't I saying things contrary to what I'd said before?

Tht.: Evidently.

Str.: What then? In attaching 'it' (τὸ), wasn't I discussing it as one?

Tht.: Yes.

Str.: And also in speaking of it as something unspeakable, unsayable, and unutterable, I was making my speech as if it concerned one thing.

Tht.: Of course.

Str.: But we say that, if one speaks correctly, one shouldn't determine it as either one or plural, nor call it 'it' at all, since even by that label one would be calling it with the character of oneness.

Tht.: Absolutely.

Str.: Then what will one say about me? For one will find that the refutation of what is not has been defeating me now and all along. So, as I have said, let us not look in what I say, at any rate, for the correct way of speaking (τὴν ὀρθολογίαν) of what is not.¹²¹ (*Sph.* 238d5–239b4)

¹²⁰ In the sixth deduction (163b–164b) Parmenides, starting from the hypothesis that 'the one is not in any way' concludes, among many other things, that ἐπιστήμη, δόξα, αἴσθησις, λόγος and ὄνομα do not belong to *this* one, but he does not seem to consider *this* conclusion objectionable.

¹²¹ ΞΕ. Οὐκ ἐννοεῖς αὐτοῖς τοῖς λεχθεῖσιν ὅτι καὶ τὸν ἐλέγχοντα εἰς ἀπορίαν καθίστησι τὸ μὴ ὄν οὕτως, ὥστε, ὅποταν αὐτὸ ἐπιχειρῇ τις ἐλέγχειν, ἐναντία αὐτὸν αὐτῷ περὶ ἐκεῖνο ἀναγκάζεσθαι λέγειν;

ΘΕΑΙ. Πῶς φῆς; εἰπέ ἔτι σαφέστερον.

ΞΕ. Οὐδὲν δεῖ τὸ σαφέστερον ἐν ἐμοὶ σκοπεῖν. ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ὑποθέμενος οὔτε ἐνὸς οὔτε τῶν πολλῶν τὸ μὴ ὄν δεῖν μετέχειν, ἄρτι τε καὶ νῦν οὕτως ἐν αὐτὸ εἴρηκα· τὸ μὴ ὄν γὰρ φημί. συνίης τοι;

As I have suggested above, someone like Parmenides might appear to be ready to embrace the conclusion of T83 that it is impossible to think or speak of what is not. But now the Stranger signals the difficulty that reaching this conclusion about what is not (or, as the Stranger himself puts it, 'trying to refute' what is not), as he has just done, is a self-defeating operation: whoever engages in such an attempt, necessarily ends up 'saying things contrary to himself'. The large umbrella of the Greek expression ἐναντία αὐτῷ λέγειν seems to shelter at least two distinct difficulties discussed in T86:

- (1) the single statement 'what is not should not share either in oneness or in plurality' is self-refuting because the way it is phrased, with the singular 'what is not' (τὸ μὴ ὄν) as its subject, contradicts its content. Since that content is put here in the form of a prohibition (cf. the late-learners' linguistic bans in section 13.4), we could speak of pragmatic self-refutation only if we broaden the scope of that notion so as to include the breaking of a rule by the very way the rule is presented.¹²² However, since this modal phrasing does not seem essential here, the corresponding assertion of 'what is not does not share either in oneness or in plurality' would be best classified as an instance of *ad hominem* self-refutation: the way in which its proposer puts it forward, using the singular 'what is not', conflicts with the asserted content, since its correctness would presuppose that what is not shares in oneness;
- (2) the way the 'refutation' of what is not is finally epitomised ('is unutterable, unsayable and unspeakable') is inconsistent with something else which the Stranger maintained just a moment before, that what is not has no share in being, unity or plurality: the Stranger should

ΘΕΑΙ. Ναί.

ΞΕ. Καὶ μὴν αὐτὸ σμικρὸν ἐμπροσθεν ἀφθεγκτὸν τε αὐτὸ καὶ ἄρρητον καὶ ἀλογον ἔφην εἶναι. συνέπῃ;

ΘΕΑΙ. Συνέπομαι. πῶς γὰρ οὐ;

ΞΕ. Οὐκοῦν τό γε εἶναι προσάπτειν πειρώμενος ἐναντία τοῖς πρόσθεν ἔλεγον;

ΘΕΑΙ. Φαίνη.

ΞΕ. Τί δέ; τὸ τὸ προσάπτων οὐχ ὡς ἐνὶ διελεγόμεν;

ΘΕΑΙ. Ναί.

ΞΕ. Καὶ μὴν ἀλογὸν γε λέγων καὶ ἄρρητον καὶ ἀφθεγκτὸν ὡς γε πρὸς ἐν τὸν λόγον ἐποιοῦμην.

ΘΕΑΙ. Πῶς δ' οὐ;

ΞΕ. Φαμέν δέ γε δεῖν, εἴπερ ὁρθῶς τις λέξει, μήτε ὡς ἐν μήτε ὡς πολλὰ διορίζειν αὐτό, μηδὲ τὸ παράπαν αὐτὸ καλεῖν ἐνὸς γὰρ εἶδει καὶ κατὰ ταύτην ἂν τὴν πρόσρησιν προσαγορεύοιτο.

ΘΕΑΙ. Παντάσσι γε.

ΞΕ. Τὸν μὲν τοῖνυν ἐμέ γε τί τις ἂν λέγοι; καὶ γὰρ πάλαι καὶ τὰ νῦν ἡττημένον ἂν εὑροί περὶ τὸν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἔλεγον. ὥστε ἐν ἑμοί γε λέγοντι, καθάπερ εἶπον, μὴ σκοπῶμεν τὴν ὁρθολογίαν περὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν.

¹²² Remember that in (strict) pragmatic self-refutation a proposition is falsified by the way in which it is presented (cf. chapter 10).

not have used 'is', thus attaching being to what is not, and should not have referred to what is not as 'it', in the singular, or predicated of it a series of adjectives in the singular. In point of logic, this is not a self-refutation at all, but a *diachronic inconsistency* between the content of certain statements and what is implied by the way other statements are subsequently put forward (although the latter were not unrelated to the former, but incoherent attempts to articulate the consequences of them).

It is not surprising to see Plato conflate the two logical patterns of (1) and (2) under the same description: although, as we have learnt, he recurs to self-refutation arguments a number of times at some important junctures in his dialogues, he does not possess or coin any technical term for 'self-refutation', nor does he ever reflect explicitly on its logic. What is surprising, however, is that, contrary to what we might have expected and we might unreflectively assume when first reading T83 and T86, the Stranger does not confess that his most blatant self-refutation consisted in *speaking* of what is not as *unspeakable*, in *saying* that it is *unsayable*, and in *uttering* the phrase 'what is not' in the process of informing us that what is not is *unutterable*.¹²³ I presume that this silence does not hide any profound reason, and simply reflects the fact that this aspect of the self-defeating character of the Stranger's 'refutation' of what is not is so manifest that it does not require mention and is left for the reader to notice.¹²⁴ It is important to clarify, at any rate, that this unstated self-refutation should be catalogued as *ad hominem*, and not as strictly pragmatic,¹²⁵ since the Stranger's original statement in T83 was that what is not is not utterable, sayable or speakable *correctly*, and not of course the only too obvious falsehood that what is not cannot be uttered, said or spoken of at all. One might suggest that in the present context a failure to speak correctly of what is not could be taken to amount to the same as a failure to refer to it and thus to speak of it *at all*;¹²⁶ even so, however, the assertion that 'what is not is unutterable, unsayable and unspeakable', by failing to refer to its

¹²³ Pace Notomi 1999: 176.

¹²⁴ One might be tempted to conjecture that attributing to something negative predicates like 'unspeakable' and 'unsayable' does not count as speaking of it or saying something about it (the same manoeuvre does not seem viable for 'unutterable'); however, this does not seem to be Plato's idea, since in T86, at 239a5–6, he writes that stating that what is not is 'unutterable (ἀφθεγκτὸν), unsayable (ἄρρητον) and unspeakable (ἀλογον)' *is* making a speech (λόγος).

¹²⁵ Pace Notomi 1999: 176.

¹²⁶ The puzzle that it is impossible to speak falsely depends on the assumption that to speak falsely is to speak of what is not (without qualification); since to speak of what is not is to speak of nothing, and to speak of nothing is not to speak at all, it is impossible to speak falsely (cf. e.g. *Euthd.* 283e–284c, *Crat.* 429c–430a, *Thi.* 187d–189b, *Sph.* 237c–e (summarised on p. 236 above)). On this puzzle and

purported subject-matter, would not represent an actual counterexample to, and thus falsification of, its own propositional content by pragmatic self-refutation.

In light of what we have seen in T86, let us open a parenthesis and revisit briefly the final two sentences of T85. One might suggest that when Parmenides and Aristotle discard the conclusion that 'the one is not named or spoken of, nor is it the object of judgement, knowledge, or perception', they do so on the grounds that clearly the one has just been named, spoken of and judged about in that very conclusion.¹²⁷ Even if this were the case (and I have suggested above that a different interpretation appears more natural given Plato's wording), the claim that it is impossible that the one has those negative characteristics should be taken *cum grano salis*. An incoherent attempt to speak and judge about the one (by saying that it is not the object of speech and judgement) cannot by its very existence falsify (by pragmatic self-refutation) what is said and judged, since it may well be the case that that attempt is actually a failure to even refer to the one, exactly because we cannot speak and judge about the one.¹²⁸ In other words, all the argument could prove is that it is impossible to assert coherently and meaningfully that 'the one is not named or spoken of, nor is it the object of judgement, knowledge, or perception'; we might still try to do, incoherently and vacuously, what is in fact impossible.

This proposed alternative reading of T85 brings into the picture the notion of operational self-refutation; this notion cannot be applied, however, to the analysis of T86, since the Stranger confesses that he has been defeated by his own refutation of what is not, and not, more generally, that such a refutation and its conclusions *cannot* be coherently carried on and asserted by anyone. The final remark in T86, that no way of speaking correctly (ὀρθολογία) is available to the Stranger, is consistent with the possibility that such a way exists or might be devised (and with the truth of the Stranger's 'refutation' of what is not). For example, since the emphasis in T86 was only on the way in which the Stranger's words unwittingly and self-refutingly attached oneness and being to what is not, one could address

its Platonic solution cf. Denyer 1991 and Burnyeat 2002; for two related Platonic passages analysed in this book cf. part 1, chapter 4.

¹²⁷ For such a suggestion cf. e.g. McCabe 1994a: 102, Scolnicov 2003: 94–5.

¹²⁸ Baltzly (1996: 153–4) understands the impossibility of the conclusion 'the one is not named or spoken of, nor is it the object of judgement, knowledge, or perception' as a direct consequence of its operational self-refutation, and thus maintains that 'One *must* have a share of Being' (the contradictory of the assumption from which that self-refuting conclusion follows) is established as a true unhypothetical first principle. For my perplexities concerning Baltzly's interpretation of the role of operational self-refutation for Plato cf. pp. 230–4.

this specific qualm by imagining a reformed language whose morphology includes forms completely indeterminate between the singular and the plural and whose syntax bypasses the use of the copula (for the mere sake of argument, something like τὸ μὴ ὄντι ἀλογόνται). I am not suggesting, of course, that this is the solution to the puzzle of talking of what is not at which Plato himself is hinting: in the final part of the *Sophist* the correct way of speaking of what is not (and thus to account for the possibility of falsehood) will be to give up completely the absolute notion of what is not in any way whatsoever, which generates the problematic consequences of T85 and T86, and replace it with the relative notion of not-being as difference (*Sph.* 257b3–4).

The difficulties encountered in the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides* with the challenge of providing some kind of account for a completely ineffable non-entity did not remain solitary in the history of philosophy. The highest principle in the Neoplatonic tradition, the One 'beyond being',¹²⁹ inherited the character of the absolutely negative one of the *Parmenides*' first deduction,¹³⁰ including those very features, unthinkability, unknowability and ineffability, which should make it extremely hard, if possible at all, to form any coherent discourse about it. It is beyond the scope of my present enterprise to try to offer an account of this later history here; some sketchy remarks on a handful of texts will have to suffice. It is probably with the *aporia* of T86 in mind that Plotinus (205–270 AD) suggested that, although we cannot directly say (λέγειν) the unsayable One, we can speak 'about' or 'round about' (λέγειν περί) it, by saying what it is *not* (*apophasis*), thus getting to grasp it non-cognitively and acquiring some sense of it (cf. *Enn.* 5.3.14). Moreover, even when we speak of the One and we appear to predicate something positive of it (e.g. 'is the cause'), actually we are only expressing our own mental pangs (ὠδῖνες) and affections (πάθη) (cf. e.g. 5.5.6 and 6.9.3), 'our sense of our contingency and dependence which evokes a foundation of reality, the first principle which we are not',¹³¹ and our urge towards it. However, 'apophatic' language, by trying to express what is inexpressible (at least discursively), is entangled in inconsistency too; this is why it must be finally abandoned (*negatio negationis*), and replaced by recognition of the ultimate transcendence of

¹²⁹ Cf. *Resp.* vi, 509b8–10 for the idea, which is ultimately at the basis of this conception of the One, that the form of 'the Good is not being, but still beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power' (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος).

¹³⁰ Cf. Dodds 1928.

¹³¹ O'Meara 2000: 248. On apophatic language in Plotinus cf. also Sells 1985, Schroeder 1996.

the One, as Proclus (c. 412–485 AD) later pointed out explicitly, reviving Plato's original insight:

τ87 And having attributed such a thing [*sc.* apophatic speech] to the First God, one must again remove also the negations from it; for there could not be any account or name of it, Parmenides says; and if there is no account of it, it is evident that there is not even negation . . . and something impossible appears, somehow, at the end of the hypothesis; for if there is not even an account (λόγος) of the One, not even this very account (λόγος) which maintains these things is appropriate to the One. And there is nothing amazing if those who want to know the unsayable (ἄρρητον) through an account reduce this to the impossible (εἰς τὸ ἀδύνατον περιάγειν τὸν λόγον) . . . so that even if there were an account of the ineffable, it would never cease being thrown down because of itself (περὶ ἑαυτῷ καταβαλλόμενος) and it would conflict with itself (πρὸς ἑαυτὸν διαμάχεται).¹³² (*Theol. Plat.* 2.10.63, 20–64, 9)

Clearly encouraged by the ending of the first deduction of the *Parmenides*,¹³³ Proclus remarks that it is in order to avoid a *reductio ad impossibile* that the *via negationis* must also be abandoned as a way of expressing the One: silence is the outcome of any possible theorising and talking about the One. Later in the passage, however, he turns to phrases more suggestive of the idea of self-refutation ('being thrown down because of itself',¹³⁴ 'would conflict with itself'), but seems uninterested in more precise analysis of the logical faults plaguing apophatic language.¹³⁵

It was Damascius, the last of the Academics (c. 462–538 AD), who brought the Neoplatonic reflection on ineffability further and to its extreme consequences, both by the breadth and by the sophistication of his treatment.¹³⁶

¹³² καὶ δὲ τῷ πρώτῳ θεῷ τὸν τοιοῦτον ἀναθέντας πάλιν αὐτὸν καὶ τῶν ἀποφάσεων ἐξαίρειν οὐδὲ γὰρ λόγος ἐκείνου γένοιτ' ἂν οὐδὲ ὄνομα, φησὶν ὁ Παρμενίδης, οὐδὲν εἰ δὲ μηδεὶς ἔστιν ἐκείνου λόγος, δῆλον ὡς οὐδὲ ἀπόφασις . . . , καὶ ἀδύνατον πῶς ὑποφαίνεται τελευτώσης τῆς ὑποθέσεως· εἰ γὰρ μηδὲ εἷς ἔστι τοῦ ἐνὸς λόγος, οὐδὲ αὐτὸς οὗτος ὁ ταῦτα διατεινόμενος λόγος τῷ ἐνὶ προσήκει. καὶ θαυμαστὸν οὐδὲν τὸ ἄρρητον τῷ λόγῳ γνωρίζειν ἐθέλοντας εἰς τὸ ἀδύνατον περιάγειν τὸν λόγον . . . ὥστε καὶ εἰ λόγος εἴη τοῦ ἄρρητου, περὶ ἑαυτῷ καταβαλλόμενος οὐδὲν παύεται καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν διαμάχεται.

¹³³ For Proclus' interpretation of it cf. p. 237n15.

¹³⁴ For similar uses of καταβάλλειν in Plato cf. τ3 on p. 35 and p. 36n15.

¹³⁵ Other important texts on *negatio negationis* occur in the seventh book of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*, preserved only in the Latin version of William of Moerbeke (cf. in particular 7.70, 25–33; 7.74, 9–76, 7). For the ineffability theme in Proclus cf. Beierwaltes 1979: 339–82, 395–8, Mortley 1986: vol. II, 97–118, Abbate 2001.

¹³⁶ Of course the theme of ineffability had a long and important life in antiquity outside the Platonic tradition, especially within Gnosticism and Christian theology (to limit ourselves to Western traditions). I will quote here only the most suggestive passage to be found in Augustine:

Diximusne aliquid et sonuimus aliquid dignum Deo? Immo vero nihil me aliud quam dicere voluisse sentio; si autem dixi, non hoc est quod dicere volui. Hoc unde scio, nisi quia Deus ineffabilis est, quod autem a me dictum est, si ineffabile esset, dictum non esset? Ac per hoc ne ineffabilis quidem dicendus est Deus, quia et hoc cum dicitur, aliquid dicitur. Et fit nescio qua

Having postulated something transcending even the One in unknowability and inexpressibility, the absolutely 'Ineffable' (ἀπόρρητον),¹³⁷ in his *Doubts and Solutions Concerning First Principles* Damascius recognises that this 'completely Ineffable is so ineffable that one cannot even affirm of it that it is ineffable' (*Princ.* 1.10, 23–4):¹³⁸ about it we are, and we can only be, in a state of 'hyper-ignorance' (ὑπερόγνοια) (1.84, 18). Damascius thus embraces the Stranger's self-refutation charge against apophatic speech about the Ineffable, to which he refers explicitly more than once as a περιτροπή (1.23, 1–4; 1.23, 22–24, 3).¹³⁹ Although Damascius does not use consistently περιτροπή and περιτρέπειν with the technical meaning we are interested in, and sometimes gives the impression of abusing them under the spell of their philosophical pedigree, his choice of the reversal jargon with reference to the *Sophist's* argument is sensitive.¹⁴⁰ Let us look at only a couple of passages in which first the περιτροπή charge is formulated and then Damascius' own response is proposed:

τ88 If by saying of it [*sc.* the Ineffable] these very things, that it is ineffable, that it is the inaccessible sanctuary of all the things, that it is unintelligible, we incur a reversal in what we say (περιτρεπόμεθα τῷ λόγῳ), one must know that these are the terms and concepts of our own pangs (ὠδίνων) which, however numerous they are, dare to curiously inquire into it and get stuck on

pugna verborum, quoniam si illud est ineffabile quod dici non potest, non est ineffabile quod vel ineffabile dici potest. Quae pugna verborum silentio cavenda potius quam voce pacanda est.

Have I said something [when speaking of the Trinity] and uttered something worthy of God? No, I have the feeling that I have done nothing else than wishing to speak; but if I have said something, this is not what I wanted to say. From what do I know this, if not because God is ineffable (*ineffabilis*)? But what has been said by me, if He is ineffable, would not have been said. And for this reason God must not even be said to be ineffable, because even when this is said, something is said. And I do not know what kind of verbal conflict (*pugna verborum*) occurs, because if the ineffable is what cannot be spoken of, then it is not ineffable, because it can actually be said to be ineffable. And this verbal conflict must be avoided by silence, rather than pacified by speech. (*Doct. Christ.* 1.6.13)

For a discussion of the (relatively minor) role of negative theology in Augustine see Mortley 1986: vol. II, 192–220, Carabine 1992. For a discussion of language, silence and *via negativa* in ancient thought cf. Franke 2007 and especially Mortley 1986.

¹³⁷ This distinction was partly influenced by Iamblichus (cf. Linguisti 1988). Damascius tended to call the One ἄρρητον ('unsayable').

¹³⁸ τὸ μὲν πᾶντ' ἀπόρρητον ἀπόρρητον, οὕτως ὡς μηδ' ὅτι ἀπόρρητον τιθεῖναι περὶ αὐτοῦ. All the references given are to the edition of Damascius' work in Westerink and Combès 1986.

¹³⁹ It is noteworthy that, unlike Plato's Eleatic Stranger, Damascius focuses explicitly on the most overtly self-refuting apophatic predications, like 'is ineffable', 'is unintelligible' (cf. τ88 below), 'is not an object of opinion' (cf. τ89 below).

¹⁴⁰ For this reason, Linguisti's idea that in these passages περιτροπή indicates 'un'antinomia di tipo semantico, affine a quella del "mentitore"' (1990: 69) cannot be accepted. For other examples of self-refutation arguments in Plato referred to by later sources in terms of περιτροπή cf. e.g. τ23 (p. 95) and Syrian. in *Metaph.* 71, 23–7 (again on Protagoras' self-refutation in the *Theaetetus*).

the threshold of the inaccessible sanctuary, and do not reveal anything about it, but indicate (μηνυσουσῶν) our own affections (οἰκεῖα πάθη) about it and their *aporia* and failures, not even clearly, but through allusions.¹⁴¹ (I.8, 12–19)

- τ89 But we have the opinion that it [*sc.* the Ineffable] is not an object of opinion. But, he [*sc.* Plato] says, this account incurs reversal (περιτρέπεται . . . ὁ λόγος), and in reality we do not even have this opinion. What then? Do we not think and believe that it is so? Yes, but these are our affections (ἡμέτερα πάθη) about it, as has often been said.¹⁴² (I.16, 5–8)

Damascius borrows Plotinus' insight that sometimes, when attempting to speak of the One, we are actually speaking of our own state of mental puzzlement concerning how to speak about it,¹⁴³ applies it to his highest principle, beyond the One, and adopts it to justify the use of apophatic language 'about' this wholly Ineffable. It is true that if interpreted as assertions about the Ineffable, all our negations are subject to περιτροπή, and thus it would be silly to entrust our hopes to apophatic *assertions*.¹⁴⁴ (or even to the method of *negatio negationis*) as ways of grasping the Ineffable; however, we must understand that apophatic language is not meant, in fact, to describe the Ineffable itself, but to express, or perhaps only 'indicate' or 'allude to' (ἐνδειξις), those feelings of helplessness and those mental cramps *we* incur whenever we try (unsuccessfully) to inquire into the Ineffable.¹⁴⁵

Both the philosophical strategy and the vocabulary adopted by Damascius are so strikingly reminiscent of the Pyrrhonists' own defence of their attitude towards language and argument that a precise debt must be supposed.¹⁴⁶ At the end of my analysis of that defence in the next and final

part of this book readers will be equipped to come back to this section and to reflect further for themselves on the extent of this similarity.

Before proceeding to part III, however, just a final observation on the way in which the Platonic legacy we have surveyed could help us to understand the function and significance of Plato's operational self-refutations. Far from believing that operationally self-refuting concepts or theses must thereby be philosophically bankrupt hypotheses and absolute falsehoods, the Neoplatonists placed them at the very pinnacle of their metaphysics, fully recognising and at the same embracing their unsolvably problematic nature. Of course this is not enough to conclude that *Plato himself* did not view operational self-refutation as a sufficient ground for rejecting certain self-refuting hypotheses as absolute falsehoods; however, it comes at least as corroboration of my contention that there is no *clear* indication in Plato's texts that operational self-refutation arguments are supposed to play the role which some modern interpreters have attributed to it.

¹⁴¹ εἰ δὲ αὐτὰ ταῦτα περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγοντες, ὅτι ἀπόρρητον, ὅτι ἄδυτον ἐστὶ τῶν πάντων, ὅτι ἀπερινόητον περιτρεπόμεθα τῷ λόγῳ, εἰδέναι χρὴ ὅτι ταῦτα ὀνόματά ἐστι καὶ νοήματα τῶν ἡμετέρων ὠδίνων ὅσαι πολυπραγμονεῖν ἐκεῖνο τολμῶσιν, ἐν προθύροις ἐστηκυῖων τοῦ ἀδύτου, καὶ οὐδὲν μὲν τῶν ἐκείνου ἐξαγγελουσῶν, τὰ δὲ οἰκεῖα πάθη περὶ αὐτὸ καὶ τὰς ἀπορίας τε καὶ ἀτευξίας ἐαυτῶν μηνυσουσῶν, οὐδὲ σαφῶς, ἀλλὰ δι' ἐνδείξεων.

¹⁴² ἀλλὰ γὰρ δοξάζομεν ὅτι ἀδόξαστον. ἢ περιτρέπεται, φησὶν, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τῷ ὄντι οὐδὲ δοξάζομεν. τί οὖν; οὐκ οἴομεθα καὶ πειθόμεθα τοῦτο οὕτως ἔχειν; ἢ τὰ γε ἡμέτερα πάθη περὶ ἐκεῖνο, ὡς εἴρηται πολλάκις.

¹⁴³ This idea had already been borrowed, without being developed in the same detail, by Proclus (*in Prmd.* 6.1191, 5–9): 'Properly speaking, we do not say anything of the One . . . nevertheless, we say something about it because of the spontaneous pangs of the soul about the One'. (οὐδὲν κυρίως ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς λέγομεν . . . λέγομεν δὲ ὁμῶς τι περὶ αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν αὐτοφυῆ τῆς ψυχῆς ὠδῖνα περὶ τὸ ἐν.)

¹⁴⁴ Cf. I.22, 15–23, 2. ¹⁴⁵ Cf. also e.g. I.12, 19–21; I.14, 20–15, 5.

¹⁴⁶ O'Meara 2000 conjectures the existence of a similar debt in the case of Plotinus, but Damascius appears to develop and extend Plotinus' idea in a way which seems to me much more reminiscent of the Pyrrhonists' (on the influence of Pyrrhonian strategies on Damascius cf. Rappe 1998). On *apophasis*, περιτροπή and ineffability in Damascius cf. also Mortley 1986: vol. II, 119–27, Linguisti 1990: 63–73 and Dillon 1996.

PART III

Scepticism and self-refutation

Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, daß sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt, wenn er durch sie – auf ihnen – über sie hinausgestiegen ist. (Er muß sozusagen die Leiter wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist).

Er muß diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig.

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* 6.54

Self-bracketing Pyrrhonism: Sextus Empiricus

To refute oneself is a shameful dialectical sin, which anyone should be most careful to avoid. We have noticed more than once, and we shall observe again in part III, the language of ridicule closely associated with self-refutation in the ancient testimonies. If you refute yourself, you are not only losing the debate: you are losing face as well. One would thus expect to find the ancients ready to say and do virtually anything rather than admit having being caught red-handed in self-refutation. It is surprising, therefore, to learn from as trustworthy a scholar as McPherran that 'one of the few brands of skepticism in the history of philosophy to . . . accept – and even embrace – the charge of self-refutation is Pyrrhonism, especially as it is represented to us by our most extensive source for Pyrrhonist "doctrine", Sextus Empiricus' (1987: 290–1), and to discover that this is not an idiosyncratic understanding of the Pyrrhonian stance, but a widespread view in scholarly literature.¹ In his 'Skeptical homeopathy and self-refutation' McPherran presents a detailed and sensitive account and defence of the way in which the sceptical 'expressions' (φωναί) and

¹ We shall see that Burnyeat shares this view; let me note here only a few other examples: 'Since nothing is true, however, it follows that not even the statements of the Sceptics themselves are true. Sextus acknowledges this inference, but the criticism is wide of the mark. The Skeptic doctrine is indeed self-refuting, but only after it has destroyed all the arguments of traditional philosophy' (Stough 1969: 146); 'Sceptics can shrug off the charge of self-refutation, even if they cannot escape from it' (Jordan 1990: 167); 'His [*sc.* Sextus] embrace of self-refutation' (Conway and Ward 1992: 198); 'I will take this acceptance of self-refutation (peritrope) as a defining character of Pyrrhonian skepticism as I understand it' (Fogelin 1994: 4); 'At all events they [*sc.* the Pyrrhonists] happily embraced self-refutation' (Hankinson 1995: 18); 'Some of them [*sc.* some Sceptics] astoundingly conceded self-refutation, but refused thereby to concede the game – they argued that self-refutation was grist to their mill' (Wardy 2006: 123–4).

I refer in particular to McPherran because he does not merely assert that ancient Pyrrhonism accepted self-refutation, but examines closely the relevant passages and tries to explain the philosophical rationale for such an acceptance. Although I criticise McPherran's overall interpretation as well as some of its details, my understanding of this topic is deeply indebted to his article.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the only attempt to explicitly challenge the standard interpretation remains Castagnoli 2000 (now partially adopted by La Sala 2005: 136–40).

arguments (λόγοι), although self-refuting, can nevertheless perform their job for the Pyrrhonists:² as the similes of purgatives, of fire and of a ladder aim to illustrate, the sceptical formulae and arguments are supposed to refute themselves, but only after having obtained their intended effect on the dogmatist's tenets, leaving him in the healthy mental condition of suspension of judgement (ἐποχή) and tranquillity (ἡσυχία).³

I shall argue that Sextus *never* accepts, and so much the less embraces, the dogmatic charge of self-refutation; what is interpreted by McPherran and many others as an admission of self-refutation is best reconstructed as a refined dialectical tool that Sextus used *against* the dogmatic charges of inconsistency and self-refutation. I shall also suggest that this tool could be used by an ancient Pyrrhonist without any need for dubious external supports, *ad hoc* justifications or philosophical bluffs.⁴

14.1 EMBRACING SELF-REFUTATION? THE RELEVANT PASSAGES AND THE PROBLEM

To begin with, I shall just introduce the four passages usually supposed to attest to Sextus' acceptance of self-refutation, sketching the main lines of McPherran's treatment of them and raising a preliminary terminological question from which my alternative reading starts.

According to McPherran, 'instances of self-refutation are – for the most part – referred to by Sextus as cases of περιτροπή' (1987: 292): when McPherran says that Sextus accepts self-refutation, then, he means that Sextus accepts περιτροπή, whether or not this or some equivalent term is used to label the dialectical manoeuvre with which we are now familiar.⁵

Here are the two passages from Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* that supposedly manifest the self-refutation of the sceptical φωνάι:

For they [*sc.* the Pyrrhonists] suppose that, just as the expression 'Everything is false' says that it too, along with everything else, is false (and similarly for 'Nothing is true'), so also 'Nothing more' says that it too, along with everything else, is no more, and hence it cancels itself along with (συμπεριγράφει) everything else. And we say the same of the other sceptical expressions . . . the Sceptics utter their own

² In this section I shall use 'Pyrrhonist(s)' and 'Sceptic(s)' interchangeably, to refer to the adherent(s) of the 'Sceptical way' or 'persuasion' (σκεπτική ἄγωγή) as it is outlined in Sextus' *corpus*.

³ For a masterful analysis of the therapeutic aspects of the Pyrrhonian method cf. Nussbaum 1991. Cf. also Cohen 1984, Voelke 1990.

⁴ This chapter is a substantially revised and expanded version of Castagnoli 2000. I shall signal, *ad locum*, only the main points on which I have revised my earlier position.

⁵ We have seen, however, that McPherran's understanding of περιτροπή differs in important respects from the one I have defended (cf. part 1, chapter 6).

expressions in such a way that they are implicitly cancelled (περιγράφονται) by themselves. (PH 1.14–15)⁶

In the case of all the sceptical expressions, you should understand that we do not affirm definitely that they are true – after all, we say that they can be destroyed by themselves, being cancelled along with (συμπεριγράφονται) what they are applied to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours. (PH 1.206)

McPherran interprets Sextus as if he were overtly admitting that the sceptical expressions are subject to περιτροπή, and more exactly to a species of it reducible to Mackie's *absolute self-refutation*: they are 'single-premise reversals where the *content* of some claim is directly responsible for its *falsity*' (1987: 292).⁷

Let me now introduce the two alleged occurrences of Sextus' acceptance of the self-refutation of the sceptical 'proof against proof' (hereafter also PAP):

Arguments, like purgative drugs which evacuate themselves along with the matter present in the body, can actually cancel themselves along with (συμπεριγράφειν) the other arguments which are said to be probative. (PH 2.188)

Just as, for example, fire after consuming the fuel destroys also itself, and just as purgatives after driving the fluids out of the body expel themselves as well, so too the argument against proof, after abolishing every proof, can cancel also itself along with (συμπεριγράφειν) them. (M 8.480)

McPherran classifies these among those cases of περιτροπή which should be analysed in terms of Mackie's *pragmatic self-refutation*, 'where a proposition is *falsified* by the particular *mode* in which it is presented' (1987: 293–4).⁸

McPherran refers to the arguments in the four passages just quoted as instances of different forms of self-refutation, which he identifies with the Greek περιτροπή. I believe this interpretation faces two formidable difficulties. First, ancient περιτροπή cannot be reduced to our self-refutation, at least if 'our' self-refutation is defined through Mackie's influential standards.⁹ Second, it is an indisputable fact that in none of *those* passages

⁶ The translations of PH provisionally adopted (and slightly revised) here are drawn from Annas and Barnes 2000; those of M 7–8 from Bury 1935. In sections 14.2 and 14.3 I will offer my own translations of these passages.

⁷ On Mackie's 'absolute self-refutation' cf. part 1, chapter 2.

⁸ On pragmatic self-refutation cf. part II, chapter 10.

⁹ On this point I failed to challenge McPherran's view in Castagnoli 2000.

do the noun περιτροπή or the verb περιτρέπειν appear: the only term linking all the passages is συμπεριγράφειν (just in one case περιγράφειν).

Since I have argued extensively for my first contention in part I and part II, I shall focus here on my second qualm. McPherran claims that 'instances of self-refutation are – for the most part – referred to by Sextus as cases of περιτροπή'; things being so, we might salvage McPherran's proposal by looking at our cases as some of the few instances in which the idea of περιτροπή is expressed in alternative, but essentially equivalent, terms. But can (συμ)περιγράφειν be regarded as synonymous with περιτρέπειν? Does Sextus use it somewhere else to express the notion of reversal?

We have found an occurrence of περιγράφειν at PH 1.14–15, where our quoted translation said that the sceptical φωναί are *cancelled* by themselves. McPherran interprets that as an overt admission by Sextus of (absolute) self-refutation, and thus falsification, which the φωναί are exposed to, clearly paraphrasing 'to cancel' with 'to refute', 'to falsify'. But an examination of all the other occurrences of περιγράφειν makes it clear that such a paraphrase is ungrounded at best, since this term is never used by Sextus to indicate some form of refutation involving falsification. Besides 'to cancel', most of the meanings περιγράφειν can assume in ancient Greek are represented in Sextus' *corpus*: 'exclude' (M 7.268); 'delineate', 'define', 'determine' (M 1.68, 6.45); 'draw a line around', 'circumscribe' (M 5.79, 9.257); 'bring to a conclusion' (PH 2.259, 3.279).¹⁰

As for συμπεριγράφειν, its several occurrences in Sextus are the earliest extant in Greek literature.¹¹ In Sextus' usage the compound συμπεριγράφειν did not inherit the wide semantic range of περιγράφειν: in all its occurrences it takes (and, I shall argue, delimits) one and the same of the five possible meanings mentioned above: 'to cancel'. Not only does Sextus use συμπεριγράφειν univocally, but he also makes a quite specialised use of it. Here are a couple of examples in which Sextus' use of the verb is apparent:

T90 If there is no right, neither will there be a left, owing to the fact that each of these is relative; and if there is no left, the notion of right is also cancelled along with it (συμπεριγράφεται).¹² (M 8.164)

¹⁰ The noun περιγραφή (M 3.86, 5.23, 7.277, 8.161, 8.162, 8.387, 8.394, 9.103, 9.261 (*bis*), 10.15, 10.263) shares only a part of the semantic richness of the verb, appearing in Sextus always in the phrase κατὰ περιγραφὴν, usually with the meaning of 'alone', 'independently'.

¹¹ PH 1.14, 1.206, 2.47, 2.84 (*bis*), 2.188, 3.1, 3.97, 3.130; M 7.12, 8.164, 8.339, 8.480. We find two occurrences in Clement of Alexandria, who might have been roughly a contemporary of Sextus (Strom. 6.15.119, 8.7.22.2; cf. p. 351n137).

¹² μηδενὸς γὰρ ὄντος δεξιῦ οὐδὲ ἀριστερόν τι ἔσται διὰ τὸ τῶν πρὸς τι εἶναι τούτων ἑκάτερον, καὶ μηδενὸς ὄντος ἀριστεροῦ συμπεριγράφεται καὶ ἡ τοῦ δεξιῦ ἐπίνοια.

T91 Hence on all these grounds the criterion by which objects are to be judged is found to be inapprehensible. Since the other criteria too are cancelled along with (συμπεριγραφομένων) this one...¹³ (PH 2.46–7)

'Right' and 'left' are strongly correlative concepts; if one of them no longer existed, the other one would be cancelled as well. Note that 'would be cancelled' must mean something like 'would no longer exist', 'would no longer be conceivable', and not 'would be false', or 'would undergo reversal' (into what?). In the second example, if the 'criterion by which' (i.e. man) is found to be inapprehensible, then the other criteria are cancelled along with it, each of them being strictly related to the concept of man. In this case, 'are cancelled' clearly must mean 'turn out to be inapprehensible': if the notion of man is inapprehensible, it is *a fortiori* plausible that the human senses or intellect (criteria 'through which')¹⁴ and human appearances (criteria 'in virtue of which')¹⁵ are inapprehensible too.

Most of the other Sextan passages in which συμπεριγράφειν occurs share the same structure: there is something, say *x*, that Sextus argues to be not-*P* (most times, non-existent), against the dogmatists who hold that *x* is *P*; and there is something else, say *y*, strictly related to *x* (typically, *x* and *y* are strong correlatives), that is concluded to be not-*P* as well, because of its relation with *x*. Sextus maintains that in these cases there is no need for a separate proof that *y* is not-*P*, because this has been automatically proved in the very act of proving that *x* is not-*P*: *y* is indirectly exposed to the same fate as *x*, in the very moment in which *x* is.¹⁶

If συμπεριγράφειν expresses a kind of 'cancellation' that is not a falsification, *a fortiori* it does not look like a promising candidate for Sextus to use to confess the absolute self-refutation of his own φωναί and the pragmatic self-refutation of his λόγοι. McPherran fails to notice this, and more generally to appreciate any semantic difference between περιτρέπειν (and περιτροπή), on the one hand, and (συμ)περιγράφειν, on the other.¹⁷

As we know, Sextus frequently uses περιτρέπειν and περιτροπή to express what McPherran analyses as 'self-refutation'. Why on earth in the act of accepting the charge of self-refutation should he carefully eschew these terms (the very terms in which – as we shall see in section 14.3 – the

¹³ διόπερ ἐξ ἀπάντων τούτων ἀκατάληπτον εὑρίσκεται τὸ κριτήριον ὃν οὐ κριθήσεται τὰ πράγματα. συμπεριγραφομένων δὲ τούτῳ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων κριτηρίων...

¹⁴ Cf. PH 2.48–69. ¹⁵ Cf. PH 2.70–9.

¹⁶ For Sextus' analogous use of συμπεριτρέπειν and συναναρπεῖν cf. PH 3.130 and Castagnoli 2000: 272–3n21.

¹⁷ The same *de facto* identification is made by Hankinson: 'Hence he [*sc.* the Sceptic] can be perfectly happy about the self-refuting (or as Sextus prefers to say, self-cancelling) nature of his expressions, or *phonaí*' (1995: 299, italics mine).

dogmatist formulates his charge at least in the case of the 'proof against proof'? This question is bound to be a thorny exegetical puzzle for anyone who embraces the reading that makes Sextus admit that the Pyrrhonist refutes himself.

Let us see now how to save Sextus' consistency in word-choice and, at the same time, in philosophical argumentation.

14.2 SELF-BRACKETING EXPRESSIONS: PURGATIVES AND EXPUNGING BRACKETS (PH 1.13–15, 1.206)

14.2.1 *The two senses of δογματίζειν*

The first passage we have encountered above occurs in a section which, as its title indicates, is meant to give an answer to the question as to whether the Sceptic 'dogmatizes', 'has beliefs'. Here is Sextus' answer:

T92 We say that the Sceptic does not hold beliefs (μὴ δογματίζειν) not in the sense of 'belief' (δόγμα) according to which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing (εὐδοκεῖν) in something (for the Sceptic assents to the affections (πάθεσι) compelled in accord with the appearance – for example, he would not say, when heated (or chilled), 'I think I am not heated (or chilled)'). Rather, we say that he does not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent (συγκατάθεσιν) to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences (for the Pyrrhonist does not assent to anything unclear (οὐδενὶ τῶν ἀδήλων)).¹⁸ (PH 1.13)

The allusion is to the polemic between Sceptics and dogmatists, and to the typical dogmatic charge that the Sceptics do not really live ἀδοξάστως, 'without beliefs'.¹⁹ The Sceptics claim to be in an untroubled condition of suspension of judgement; the dogmatists protest that this claim is insincere and that the behaviour (linguistic and otherwise) of the Sceptics shows that they too, like everyone else, actually hold beliefs.

Sextus responds that when the Sceptic denies holding beliefs or 'dogmatizing' (μὴ δογματίζειν) he is not denying his mere acquiescing (εὐδοκεῖν) in the passive affections (πάθη) he finds himself with; he admits involuntarily assenting to them, and in this weak sense of δόγμα he can be said

¹⁸ λέγομεν δὲ μὴ δογματίζειν τὸν σκεπτικὸν οὐ κατ' ἐκεῖνο τὸ σημαινόμενον τοῦ δόγματος καθ' ὃ δόγμα εἶναι φασὶ τινες κοινότερον τὸ εὐδοκεῖν τιτι πράγματι (τοῖς γὰρ κατὰ φαντασίαν κατηναγκασμένοις πάθεσι συγκατατίθεται ὁ σκεπτικός, οἷον οὐκ ἂν εἴποι θερμαινόμενος ἢ ψυχόμενος ὅτι δοκῶ μὴ θερμαίνεσθαι ἢ ψύχεσθαι), ἀλλὰ μὴ δογματίζειν λέγομεν καθ' ὃ δόγμα εἶναι φασὶ τινες τὴν τιτι πράγματι τῶν κατὰ τὰς ἐπιστήμας ζητουμένων ἀδήλων συγκατάθεσιν (οὐδενὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀδήλων συγκατατίθεται ὁ Πυρρώνειος).

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. D.L. 9.102–4.

to have beliefs.²⁰ But, on the other hand, the Sceptic does not 'dogmatise' in the narrower sense in which δόγμα is assent to unclear things (ἀδηλα). Although in Sextus' *corpus* we find no explicit definition of ἀδηλον, it will be sufficient for our present purposes to say, roughly, that for the Pyrrhonist all those things are 'unclear' that happen to be (or not to be) the case 'out there', in 'external reality' (τὰ ἐκτὸς ὑποκείμενα).²¹ Honey appears to me sweet (at the present moment): this present 'appearing' is a φαινόμενον, engendering in me an involuntary πάθος, a taste of sweetness, in which I cannot but acquiesce. But that honey is (or is not) actually sweet is not a φαινόμενον, rather something about the thing underlying it, i.e. about what honey itself is like.²² It is therefore one of the unclear matters on which the dogmatists exercise their dogmatic rashness, and about which the Pyrrhonist withholds his assent and has no beliefs. The Pyrrhonist will not be in dread of saying that honey *appears* sweet to him (at the moment), and overtly admits 'assenting' and 'holding beliefs' in this weaker and non-committal sense;²³ but he will never compromise himself with the assertion that honey *is* sweet (PH 1.19–20). Even if sometimes he uses 'is', he will do so loosely, in the sense of 'appears' (PH 1.135, 1.198; M 11.19).²⁴

A brief parenthesis must be opened here. T92 is at the centre of a vast scholarly debate as to whether Sextus' Pyrrhonism is to be considered 'rustic' or 'urbane', that is whether Sextus' claim that the Pyrrhonist lives 'without beliefs' has to be interpreted as 'The Pyrrhonist has no beliefs *at all*', or only as 'The Pyrrhonist rejects a certain kind of *dogmatic* belief' (or the 'Pyrrhonist rejects all beliefs reached in a certain dogmatic way').²⁵ Although my discussion will aim to be as neutral as possible between the two options (and a variety of intermediate nuances), it will probably betray

²⁰ For the meaning of δόγμα and δογματίζειν in ancient Greek and in Sextus see, in particular, Barnes 1982b: 6–12 and Frede 1987. It represents a terminological anomaly for Sextus to label the Pyrrhonist's acquiescence δόγμα, even though in a weaker sense; from here onward when I use 'belief' or 'believe', without specifications, I shall always take them with the standard Sextan strong meaning of 'dogmatic(ally) assent(ing) to something ἀδηλον'.

²¹ For the broad sense in which I intend, here and elsewhere, 'things', 'matters' and 'external reality', cf. p. 262. For the point that all 'external things' are ἀδηλα, cf. M 7.366.

²² Cf. PH 1.22 for the point that when the Sceptic says that he accepts the φαινόμενον he is not referring to the thing which produces the appearance, but to the appearance (φαντασία) of it.

²³ It is an open question whether belief in the weak sense of 'acquiescence' consists in taking the way one is 'appeared to' as true (cf. e.g. Fine 2000 and 2003: 369–75) or is something which, albeit incorrigible, is not truth-evaluable, i.e. neither true nor false (cf. e.g. Burnyeat 1980, 1982).

²⁴ For lucid presentations of the Pyrrhonist's attitude of 'non-assertion' cf. Stough 1984, Spinelli 1991 and Brunschwig 1997.

²⁵ For this key debate, and for in-depth analyses of T92 and related passages, see Burnyeat 1980, 1982, 1984, Barnes 1982b, 2007b, Frede 1987, Barney 1992, Brunschwig 1994b, Hankinson 1995: 273–308, Vogt 1998, Brennan 1999, Włodarczyk 2000, Bailey 2002, Fine 2000, 2003; La Sala 2005.

my own rustic leanings on some occasions. What is important to clarify, however, is that this controversy is not crucial for our purposes: as we will see, the use the Pyrrhonist makes of his φωναί, if not vindicated against charges and misinterpretations, could undermine the most urbane forms of scepticism, since the φωναί might seem to express negative beliefs of clear dogmatic nature.

14.2.2 The grammar of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον

After distinguishing two senses of δογματίζειν and clarifying in which sense the Sceptic 'holds beliefs', Sextus proceeds as follows:

193 But not even (ἀλλ' οὐδέ) in uttering (προφέρεισθαι) the sceptical expressions (φωναί) about unclear matters (περὶ τῶν ἀδήλων) – for example, 'Nothing more' (οὐδὲν μᾶλλον), or 'I determine nothing' (οὐδὲν ὀρίζω), or one of the other expressions which we shall later discuss – does he [sc. the Sceptic] hold beliefs. For he who holds beliefs posits as being the case (ὡς ὑπάρχον τίθεται) what he is said to believe, whereas the Sceptic posits these expressions not as absolutely being the case (οὐχ ὡς πάντως ὑπαρχούσας).²⁶ (PH 1.14)

The initial ἀλλ' οὐδέ reveals Sextus' worries here. During his philosophical activity of inquiry (σκέψις) the Sceptic gives utterance to certain 'expressions' or 'formulae' he calls φωναί ('Nothing more', 'I determine nothing', 'I suspend judgement', 'Everything is undetermined', 'Opposed to every account there is an equal account', etc.). As Mates notes, 'the word *phone*, in its fundamental sense, refers to the sound of voice, whether of man or of any other animal with a larynx and lungs' (1996: 65), and we shall understand shortly that it was not by chance that the Pyrrhonists chose this generic and noncommittal label for their utterances. The φωναί are vocal sounds the Sceptics utter,²⁷ but it is not *prima facie* apparent that the kind of generalisations most of them seem to signify express the Sceptic's mere acquiescence in his own πάθη, rather than dogmatic maxims, slogans or theses about reality.²⁸ There is thus room for the dogmatist to charge

²⁶ ἀλλ' οὐδέ ἐν τῷ προφέρεισθαι περὶ τῶν ἀδήλων τὰς σκεπτικὰς φωνάς, οἷον τὴν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ἢ τὴν οὐδὲν ὀρίζω ἢ τινα τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὧν ὕστερον λέξομεν δογματίζει. ὁ μὲν γὰρ δογματίζων ὡς ὑπάρχον τίθεται τὸ πρᾶγμα ἐκεῖνο ὃ λέγεται δογματίζειν, ὁ δὲ σκεπτικὸς τὰς φωνὰς τίθησι ταύτας οὐχ ὡς πάντως ὑπαρχούσας.

²⁷ In the case of the sceptical φωναί, Sextus' standard verb for 'to utter' is προφέρειν (PH 1.14, 1.15, 1.188 (*bis*), 1.191, 1.193, 1.204; M 11.147); he also employs the noun προφορά with the genitive (PH 1.15 (*bis*)). None the less, we find also ἐπιφθέγγεσθαι (PH 1.187, 1.213), λέγειν (PH 1.187) and φάναί (PH 1.208).

²⁸ One of the meanings of φωνή is 'saying', 'maxim', 'slogan' (see e.g. Pl. *Prt.* 341b8; Plut. *Cons. ad Apol.* 106b5; *Alex. Fort.* 330f7).

the Sceptic with 'dogmatising', in the strong sense which the Sceptic does not admit, by taking up a definite (albeit negative) position about unclear matters and their knowability. But – Sextus replies – while to believe that *p* in that strong sense you have to posit *p* as being the case, the Sceptic does not posit his φωναί as absolutely²⁹ so, i.e. he does not affirm that they are true descriptions of what is the case in the external world.

What follows is introduced by Sextus as an explanation of *why* the Sceptic does not posit his expressions as absolutely being the case:

194 For he understands (ὕπολαμβάνει γάρ) that, as 'Everything is false' says that it too, along with the other things, is false (and similarly for 'Nothing is true'), so also οὐδὲν μᾶλλον says that it too, along with the other things, is οὐ μᾶλλον, and hence cancels itself along with (ἐαυτὴν συμπεριγράφει) the other things. And we say the same also of the other sceptical expressions.³⁰ (PH 1.14)

As we have learnt in part I, 'Everything is false' is self-referring and therefore subject to dialectical reversal (since it falls within its own scope, whoever states it commits himself to admitting that it is false, and so to granting its contradictory). We are now told that, in the same way (ὥσπερ . . . οὕτως), 'Nothing more' cancels itself along with (συμπεριγράφει) the other things, and that the Sceptic's awareness of this is the reason why (γάρ) he does not take this expression as absolutely true. How should we interpret the verb συμπεριγράφειν here? How is the argument supposed to work?

It is time to learn a little more about the alleged culprit of self-refutation. From the long section about the sceptical φωναί later in the first book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (1.187–208) we know that:

(1) οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ('Nothing more'), interchangeable with οὐ μᾶλλον ('No more'), is elliptical: it stands for 'No more one thing than the other' (οὐ μᾶλλον τόδε ἢ τόδε: PH 1.188).³¹

²⁹ The exact meaning of this 'absolutely' will become apparent below.

³⁰ ὑπολαμβάνει γάρ ὅτι, ὥσπερ ἡ πάντα ἐστὶ ψευδὴ φωνὴ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἐαυτὴν ψευδὴ εἶναι λέγει, καὶ ἡ οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ὁμοίως, οὕτως καὶ ἡ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἐαυτὴν φησι μὴ μᾶλλον εἶναι καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐαυτὴν συμπεριγράφει. τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων σκεπτικῶν φωνῶν λέγομεν.

³¹ I translate οὐδὲν μᾶλλον as 'Nothing more' to preserve a certain degree of ambiguity I see in the Greek phrase. Just as οὐδὲν in οὐδὲν μᾶλλον can be taken either as a neuter pronoun or as an adverb, so 'nothing' in 'Nothing more' can be intended either as the subject (i.e. 'Nothing is more <this than that>'), or as an adverb modifying the comparative 'more' (i.e. 'Not at all more', 'Nowise more'). I think that there are a few clues suggesting that the use as a pronoun is the one Sextus has in mind when he speaks of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον:

• as we have seen, Sextus compares οὐδὲν μᾶλλον with phrases in which οὐδὲν is clearly used as a pronoun (οὐδὲν ὀρίζω, οὐδὲν ἐστὶ ἀληθές), or which are generalisations (πάντα ἐστὶ ψευδῆ);

- (2) It manifests (δηλοῖ) the Pyrrhonist's πάθος; because of the equipollence (ἰσοσθένεια) of the opposed (i.e. conflicting) matters, the Pyrrhonist ends in a state of mental equilibrium (ἄρρεψία), i.e. he assents to neither side (PH 1.190), where ἰσοσθένεια is the 'equality in what appears persuasive (πιθανόν) to us'.³² Οὐ(δὲν) μᾶλλον stands for 'I do not know which of these things I should assent to and which not assent to'³³ (PH 1.191), or for the question 'For what reason this more than that?'³⁴ (PH 1.189).
- (3) The Sceptic does not adopt οὐ(δὲν) μᾶλλον and his other φωναί about all things, but only about those unclear matters and those objects of dogmatic inquiry (PH 1.208)³⁵ which he himself has already examined (PH 1.199, 1.203).

• οὐδὲν employed adverbially is not part of Sextus' usage, apart from the idiom οὐδὲν ἧττον, which is always used, however, as a conjunction ('none the less'). Not even where we would expect it do we find this adverbial use: Sextus writes that ἡ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἐαυτὴν φησι μὴ μᾶλλον εἶναι. The use of μὴ instead of μηδὲν can be explained here either by saying that, as Sextus is happy to admit, he uses language loosely (and so is not in dread of saying that "Nowise more" says that it too is "no more"), or by saying that οὐδὲν μᾶλλον here actually means 'Nothing (is) more', in which case it would be appropriate to say that "'Nothing is more" says that it too, along with the other things, is "no more"'. (Οὐδὲν is instead clearly used adverbially once in Diogenes Laertius' account of Pyrrhonism at D.L. 9.75: 'The pirate is nowise more (οὐδὲν μᾶλλον) wicked than the liar'.)

• at PH 1.188, Sextus writes: 'For we do not, as some suppose, adopt οὐ μᾶλλον in specific enquiries (ἐν ταῖς εἰδικαῖς ζητήσεσι), and οὐδὲν μᾶλλον in generic inquiries (ἐν ταῖς γενικαῖς), but we utter οὐ μᾶλλον and οὐδὲν μᾶλλον indifferently.' Even if Sextus reminds us that the two forms have actually the same grammar, there remains the question of figuring out a possible origin for the misinterpretation Sextus takes care to avoid in this passage, which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been adequately explained by commentators. And I think we have a plausible explanation if we understand the difference between the surface meanings of οὐ μᾶλλον and οὐδὲν μᾶλλον as the difference between the apparently non-general formula 'No more', to be uttered at the end of specific investigations, and the apparently general 'Nothing is more', to be used at the end of generic inquiries (the difference between the less emphatic 'No more' and the more emphatic 'Nowise more', on the contrary, cannot explain why on earth one should think that the former is used in specific inquiries, the latter in generic ones).

³² δηλοῖ δὲ τὸ οὐ μᾶλλον τότε ἢ τότε καὶ πάθος ἡμέτερον, καθ' ὃ διὰ τὴν ἰσοσθένειαν τῶν ἀντικειμένων πραγμάτων εἰς ἄρρεψίαν καταλήγομεν, ἰσοσθένειαν μὲν λεγόντων ἡμῶν τὴν ἰσότητά τὴν κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἡμῖν πιθανόν, ἀντικείμενα δὲ κοινῶς τὰ μαχόμενα, ἄρρεψίαν δὲ τὴν πρὸς μηδέτερον συγκατάθεσιν.

³³ ἄγνοω τί μὲν τούτων χρή συγκατατίθεσθαι, τί μὲν μὴ συγκατατίθεσθαι.

Cf. D.L. 9.76: 'Thus the expression [οὐδὲν μᾶλλον] means, as also Timon says in the *Python*, "determining nothing, but suspending judgement"' (σημαίνει οὖν ἡ φωνή, καθά φησι καὶ Τίμων ἐν τῷ Πύθωνι, τὸ μηδὲν ὀρίζειν, ἀλλ' ἀπροσθετεῖν).

³⁴ τί μᾶλλον τότε ἢ τότε;

³⁵ οὐ περὶ πάντων τῶν πραγμάτων καθόλου φάμεν αὐτάς, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν ἀδήλων καὶ τῶν δογματικῶς ζητουμένων.

Οὐ(δὲν) μᾶλλον (1) corresponds then to a general formula (2) about pairs of conflicting matters (3) which are unclear and which the Sceptic has examined:

- ¬M For every pair of conflicting unclear matters³⁶ *p* and *q* which *I* have examined, *p* appears to me now as persuasive as *q*, and therefore, being unable to assent to either of them, *I* can believe neither the one nor the other (*I* suspend judgement).

This being the grammar of οὐ(δὲν) μᾶλλον,³⁷ we can now ask what is meant by "Nothing more" cancels itself along with the other things'. We know that this meaning should guarantee both some parallelism with 'Everything is false' and some explanation of why οὐδὲν μᾶλλον is not asserted by the Pyrrhonist as an absolute truth (*contra* the charge of dogmatising). I have suggested in section 14.1 above that συμπεριγράφειν is somehow context sensitive. Suppose we understood it as meaning here 'to refute along with', 'to falsify along with', as McPherran requires: 'Nothing more' says 'no more' also of itself and so is subject to absolute self-refutation, its content being directly responsible for its *falsity*. The parallelism with 'Everything is false' would be complete: on McPherran's interpretation, both of them would be self-referring and absolutely self-refuting. It is also understandable why being aware of this feature of 'Nothing more' should discourage the Pyrrhonist from dogmatically asserting it; the Pyrrhonist could never take as 'absolutely being the case' something he recognises as absolutely self-refuting, and thereby necessarily false.

I detect three main difficulties in this interpretation. We are already familiar with the first one: *pace* McPherran, not even the περιτροπή of 'Everything is false' is an absolute self-refutation *à la* Mackie.³⁸ I have also voiced my second objection above: why should Sextus not use his standard verb περιτρέπειν (or the noun περιτροπή), if he really wants to refer to such a self-refutation in τ94? But, apart from this urgent terminological question, there is a third, even more crucial point to raise against McPherran's reading: how on earth could οὐδὲν μᾶλλον turn out to be

³⁶ For the broad meaning of 'matters', here and elsewhere, cf. p. 262.

³⁷ This is the grammar οὐ(δὲν) μᾶλλον has in *Sextus* (and presumably in late Pyrrhonism), and not in ancient scepticism *tout court* (and so much the less in ancient philosophy). For a similar analysis of the meaning of οὐ(δὲν) μᾶλλον in Sextus cf. De Lacy 1958: 69–70. For Corti's view that οὐ(δὲν) μᾶλλον in its standard meaning does not signify a general avowal, but a singular non-dogmatic statement see p. 263n42.

³⁸ Cf. part 1, chapter 6, section 2.

absolutely self-refuting anyway? 'Οὐδὲν μᾶλλον falsifies itself along with the other things'; but οὐδὲν μᾶλλον does not make anything false! We have discovered in its grammar the concepts of appearance, degree of persuasiveness, assent, and belief, *not* the concepts of truth and falsehood. 'P no more than q' does not mean 'p is false and q as well' (or 'p is true and q as well'); its meaning was 'I can believe neither that p nor that q because they appear to me equally persuasive'. It is mysterious to me how the reflexivity of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον could lead to falsification by absolute self-refutation.

14.2.3 The περιγραφή argument: Pyrrhonian brackets

Let me now present my alternative interpretation of our key passage T94. As we have seen, the dogmatist charges the Pyrrhonist with holding beliefs, a disposition allegedly betrayed by the utterance of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον and, in general, of the sceptical expressions. We know that holding a belief (in the strong sense we are interested in) means giving one's assent to something unclear (ἄδηλον), and that for the Pyrrhonist whatever happens to be the case in reality, as opposed to what appears to him, is to be considered 'unclear'. Thus, in order for the Pyrrhonist to be expressing a belief when uttering οὐδὲν μᾶλλον, this expression should signify something unclear, i.e. stand for a truth-claim about some objective state of affairs or feature of reality, like the following:

¬M* For every pair of conflicting unclear matters p and q, p is as persuasive as q and therefore one ought to believe neither the one nor the other (one ought to suspend judgement).

Although ¬M* might look, at first glance, almost identical to ¬M, the two formulae radically differ. It is the quasi-modal operator 'appears to me now' and the first-person pronoun 'I' that made of ¬M a mere expression of the speaker's current frame of mind, and not a pretentious statement about reality. But in ¬M* these are replaced by the verb 'to be' (unqualified) and the impersonal pronoun 'one', and this is why ¬M* is a truth-claim about the external world, if we understand, as Sextus does, 'external world' in a generously broad sense: *ta ekstos hupokeimena*, for a given person at a given time, would include any and all things and states of affairs that he takes to exist or to be the case independently of the present *pathe* of his soul'.³⁹ If 'No more' is posited (i.e. asserted) 'as absolutely being

³⁹ Mates 1996: 19. On the scope of the notion of 'external reality' cf. also Fine 2003: 369: 'external to a given present state of being appeared to'.

the case', then it signifies something unclear, the *actual* equipoise of the *objective* force of persuasiveness of *all* unclear conflicting matters. ¬M* does not record episodes of the Sceptic's mental life (his having found all the conflicting unclear matters he has examined equally persuasive) and their present effects (suspension of judgement), but it claims that all the conflicting ἄδηλα are equally persuasive, i.e. that the reasons in favour of any of them are really as strong (or as weak) as those in favour of any other, independently of what can (rightly or wrongly) appear to Tom, Dick and Harry. Presumably ¬M* hints also at the fact that this objective equipollence is deep-rooted in an intrinsic indeterminacy of the world⁴⁰ or in an intrinsic weakness of human mind,⁴¹ or in both of them. ¬M* does not announce that, at the moment, the speaker is suspending his judgement about certain unclear matters, but that everyone always ought to suspend judgement, because the nature of things demands ἐποχή.⁴² This would clearly be more than enough to make of ¬M* a dogmatic formula unacceptable for Sextus even on the most 'urbane' interpretations of his Pyrrhonism.

Sextus clarifies that ¬M* is not the meaning οὐδὲν μᾶλλον bears for the Sceptic, but a dogmatic misinterpretation of it. The charge of dogmatism thus rests on a misunderstanding of the nature of sceptical language, which Sextus takes care to denounce and correct: actually the Pyrrhonist does not posit his expressions 'as absolutely being the case'. This carefulness in explaining the import of the sceptical language, and especially the real meaning of the sceptical expressions (or, better, the meaning intended by

⁴⁰ The idea that ἐποχή, and then ἀταραξία, are consequences of the indeterminacy of reality itself is attributed to Pyrrho by Timon on some interpretations of the well-known Aristoclean testimony (Aristoc. *ap. Eus.*, *PE* 14.18.2–4; cf. p. 347n125).

⁴¹ And not, narrowly, of the sceptical speaker's mind.

⁴² This difference between two possible understandings of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον is inspired by Corti 1998 and 2002. According to Corti, in *PH* Sextus hints that the Sceptic uses οὐδὲν μᾶλλον in two different ways. Most passages show that he adopts this elliptical formula to express the *singular* phrase (s1) ¬Mαβ: 'Given the two dogmatic theses α and β which I have just examined, I am not able to decide which I should believe and which not' (2002: 26). Since it describes a πάθος of the Sceptic, it is a non-dogmatic statement. But in *PH* 1.14–15, where Sextus ascribes to οὐδὲν μᾶλλον the property of being self-cancelling (and thus, *a fortiori*, self-referring), this formula should stand for the *universal* and *dogmatic* statement (s2) ∀p∀q(¬Mp q): 'Given any dogmatic thesis p and its antithetical thesis q, I am not able to decide which I should believe and which not' (2002: 30). While agreeing that Sextus distinguishes between a dogmatic and a non-dogmatic interpretation of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον, I suggest that he does so only to immediately discard the dogmatic one, *pace* Corti.

I also agree with Corti that where Sextus refers to the self-cancellation of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον this expression must somehow stand for a universal dogmatic statement. But while the statement (s2) for which, according to Corti, οὐδὲν μᾶλλον stands is dogmatic in so far as it is universal (and thus referring also to future πάθη of the Sceptic), ¬M* would be dogmatic not because of the *number* of things it speaks about, but because of the *kind* of things it speaks about.

the Pyrrhonists) is not unique in Sextus' *corpus*. The whole section of *PH* I concerning the *φωναί* is explicitly meant by Sextus as a way of making clear 'in what sense we [*sc.* the Sceptics] understand the sceptical utterances' (1.5). In that section we find various passages in which Sextus warns his reader about misinterpretations, and which provide a strong validation for my conjecture regarding the meaning of 'to posit "Nothing more" as absolutely being the case':

T95 We use 'I suspend judgement' (*ἐπέχω*) for 'I cannot say which of the things proposed I should believe and which I should not believe', making it clear that the matters appear to us equal (*ἴσα ἡμῖν φαίνεται*) in respect of credibility and lack of credibility. And whether they are equal (*ἴσα ἐστίν*), we do not affirm definitely (*οὐ διαβεβαιούμεθα*): we say what appears to us about them, when this strikes us.⁴³ (*PH* I.196)

T96 Hence it is clear that we do not use 'Non-assertion' (*ἀφασία*) to mean that objects are in their nature (*πρὸς τὴν φύσιν*) such as to move absolutely (*πάντως*) to non-assertion, but to make it clear that now, when we utter it, we are experiencing this affection with regard to certain matters under investigation.⁴⁴ (*PH* I.193)⁴⁵

There is another interesting passage suggesting that for Sextus misinterpreting the Sceptics' utterance of *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* is something the dogmatists are exposed to. Towards the end of *Against the Grammarians*, Sextus writes that, besides not understanding things, the grammarians do not understand words, for it is not by technical expertise (*τέχνη*), as they pretend, but by hearing it from the speakers (or writers) themselves that one can learn the meaning of words:

T97 Or how will they [*sc.* the grammarians] understand which force the expression 'Nothing more' has among the Sceptics, whether it is interrogative or declarative, and for what it is used, whether for the external object or for our affections (*τοῦ ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένου ἢ τοῦ περὶ ἡμᾶς πάθους*)?⁴⁶ (*M* I.315)

It is not by pondering thousands of times the formula *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* in the light of your dogmatic grammatical theories that you will grasp the

⁴³ τὸ δὲ ἐπέχω παραλαμβάνομεν ἀντὶ τοῦ οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν τίνι χρὴ τῶν προκειμένων πιστεῦσαι ἢ τίνι ἀπιστῆσαι, δηλοῦντες ὅτι ἴσα ἡμῖν φαίνεται τὰ πράγματα πρὸς πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν. καὶ εἰ μὲν ἴσα ἐστίν, οὐ διαβεβαιούμεθα· τὸ δὲ φαινόμενον ἡμῖν περὶ αὐτῶν, ὅτε ἡμῖν ὑποπίπτει, λέγομεν.

⁴⁴ ὅθεν δῆλόν ἐστιν, ὅτι καὶ τὴν ἀφασίαν παραλαμβάνομεν οὐχ ὡς πρὸς τὴν φύσιν τοιούτων ὄντων τῶν πραγμάτων ὥστε πάντως ἀφασίαν κινεῖν, ἀλλὰ δηλοῦντες ὅτι ἡμεῖς νῦν, ὅτε προφερόμεθα αὐτήν, ἐπὶ τῶνδε τῶν ζητούμενων τοῦτο πεπόνθαμεν.

⁴⁵ Cf. also *PH* I.197, 1.200, 1.203 (cf. p. 336n89).

⁴⁶ ἢ ποῦ συνήσουσι τίνα δύναμιν ἔχει παρὰ σκεπτικοῖς ἢ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον φωνή, πότερον πυσματική ἐστιν ἢ ἀξιωματική, καὶ ἐπὶ τίνος τάσσεται, ἀρὰ γε τοῦ ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένου ἢ τοῦ περὶ ἡμᾶς πάθους;

meaning it has for the Sceptic; you need to ask him directly, otherwise you run the risk of misunderstanding this voice as a formula concerning the world rather than the Sceptic's *πάθη*.

As to the question whether it is interrogative or declarative, we know from *PH* I.191 that the Sceptics adopt *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* indifferently (*ἀδιαφόρως*) and loosely (*καταχρηστικῶς*), either for a question or for a declarative *ἄξιωμα* (expressing, however, mere ignorance and not assent). We have also seen that some Sceptics expressly adopted the interrogative form *τί μᾶλλον τόδε ἢ τόδε*; (*PH* I.189),⁴⁷ and Sextus admits that the declarative form of *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* can be a source of misunderstanding: 'Thus, although *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* exhibits the character of assent or denial, we do not use it in this way' (*PH* I.191).⁴⁸

But Sextus does not confine himself to reassuring us that, as a matter of fact, the Pyrrhonist does not use *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* in the sense of $\neg M^*$; in T94 he also argues why by any such use it is ultimately impossible to dogmatise anyway. I interpret this argument as a defensive dialectical manoeuvre against the most obstinate dogmatic adversaries, who might refuse to listen to the Sceptic's account of the nature of his utterances, or reject it as disingenuous, and claim that the *φωναί* are phrases the Sceptic asserts just because he dogmatically believes that they truly describe some negative feature of reality of which he is eager to inform his audience.

Let us reconstruct Sextus' defensive mechanism step by step. (1) Suppose the Pyrrhonist really 'posited *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* as absolutely being the case', as the dogmatist complains: by doing so, he would be asserting a maxim like $\neg M^*$, and this would reveal that (2) he gives his assent to $\neg M^*$ (assuming that his assertion is genuine, neither ironical nor insincere). But since $\neg M^*$ means something *ἄδηλον*, (3) to assent to it is to dogmatise (by the definition of *δογματίζειν*); under assumption (1), the dogmatist's charge is *prima facie* well grounded. But the dogmatist – Sextus would reply – has told only half of the story. (4) Just because *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον*, when intended as $\neg M^*$, stands for something *ἄδηλον*, it falls within its own scope and becomes *self-referring*, exactly like 'Everything is false' (remember that the domain of *p* and *q* in $\neg M^*$ is constituted by all *ἄδηλα*, and only by them). And since $\neg M^*$ is self-referring, (5) whoever dogmatically asserts *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* is thereby also asserting that *οὐδὲν μᾶλλον* itself is *οὐ μᾶλλον* than its opposite. But this means (6) asserting that the objective reasons for

⁴⁷ Cf. also Aristoc. *ap. Eus.*, *PE* 14.18.7 (1138 on p. 344).

⁴⁸ ἢ γοῦν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον φωνὴ καὶ ἐμφαίνῃ χαρακτήρα συγκαταθέσεως ἢ ἀρνήσεως, ἡμεῖς οὐχ οὕτως αὐτῇ χρώμεθα. For the equally non-assertoric use of the sceptical expressions as exhortations or orders cf. p. 348n129.

believing $\neg M^*$ are truly as strong (or as weak) as the reasons for believing its opposite (not- $(\neg M^*)$), and that therefore it is necessary to suspend judgement about $\neg M^*$ too.⁴⁹ (7) οὐδὲν μᾶλλον, if intended and asserted as $\neg M^*$, automatically excludes itself, along with every other unclear thesis, from the set of theses which the speaker admits as possible objects of belief. According to the dogmatist, by asserting $\neg M^*$ the Pyrrhonist is conceding his assent to something unclear, thereby dogmatising (1–3). Sextus clarifies that someone who asserts $\neg M^*$ is thereby also denying his assent to it in virtue of the very meaning of $\neg M^*$, and thus is not dogmatising (or, we might say, is dogmatising no more than is not) (4–7).

Now we can appreciate why the Sceptic *cannot* dogmatise when he asserts οὐδὲν μᾶλλον. First of all, he is aware that $\neg M^*$ is a (purported) dogmatic maxim, on which a good Pyrrhonist will suspend judgement; when the Pyrrhonist utters οὐδὲν μᾶλλον he means in fact something very different, namely $\neg M$. Second, he realises that any dogmatic maxim like $\neg M^*$ has such a logical form that, were it true, one ought not to believe it, and thus there is no way of coherently believing and asserting $\neg M^*$ (if an assertion manifests your belief that something is true).⁵⁰ Not only then is $\neg M^*$ a (purported) dogmatic maxim, but it is an incoherent one; why should a Pyrrhonist want to assert it? Finally, and for the sake of argument, even if a Pyrrhonist, blind (unlike Sextus) to the characteristics of $\neg M^*$, incoherently came to believe it and asserted it, he would thereby be asserting that $\neg M^*$ ought not to be believed or asserted. Not even an incoherent asserter of $\neg M^*$, then, would manage to dogmatise after all (or at least he would be dogmatising no more than he would not). And, more importantly, as soon as he would become aware of the incoherence of his position, he would withdraw his original assertion. The outcome for him would be a mental condition of suspension of judgement on all unclear matters, including $\neg M^*$, which could itself be recorded by uttering certain φωναί: his original incoherent *assertion* of $\neg M^*$ would turn into the *utterance* of non-compromising sceptical expressions like $\neg M$, and the corresponding self-cancelling belief into suspension of judgement.⁵¹

⁴⁹ What kind of necessity is this? At times it seems that suspension of judgement automatically follows the perceived equipollence of the contrasting reasons, not as the result of further conscious inference or decision (cf. Barnes 1982b: 1), so psychological necessity might be involved. However, a weaker notion of rational obligation would already be sufficient: if you realise that all the reasons pro and con the truth of a proposition are equipollent, coherence requires you to suspend judgement (cf. Barnes' 'epistemological necessity' (1990: 20–1)).

⁵⁰ $\neg M^*$ bears close resemblance to Mackie's operationally self-refuting propositions (cf. part II, chapter 13, section 1).

⁵¹ According to Corti (2002: 40–2), by pointing out the self-refuting character of (s2) (cf. p. 263n42) Sextus is attempting to *defend* the possibility for the Sceptic of believing (s2) as a fundamental

Someone who asserts $\neg M^*$ is not a dogmatist, after all, and is well on his way towards scepticism. Not even if the dogmatist were right to say that the Pyrrhonist asserts $\neg M^*$ (and he is not), then, would the dogmatist be right to say that the Pyrrhonist dogmatises. The dogmatist's charge has been brilliantly defused by Sextus' refined argument which I have distilled from τ94 and which I baptise the 'περιγροφή argument'.⁵²

Sextus' defence is not based, *pace* McPherran, on the acceptance of the absolute self-refutation, and thus falsehood, of a dogmatic misinterpretation of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον; οὐδὲν μᾶλλον is, if thus intended, self-referring, but its self-application does not amount to a falsification.⁵³ We can still speak of a form of 'cancellation', as I have done so far, but it is crucial to realise that this is not the cancellation of something that was believed to be true and is proved instead to be false. The parallelism with 'Everything is false' is not perfect: 'Everything is false' is self-referring and must thereby be conceded to be false by its proposer; in the case of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον self-reference and

(even if provisional) predictive principle of his way of doing philosophy (ἀγωγή): according to this principle, the activity of setting out oppositions will infallibly bring about suspension of judgement. It is mysterious to me how the recognised incoherence of the belief in (s2) might allow the Sceptic to believe it every time he performs his activity. For the difference between Corti's (s2) and my $\neg M^*$ cf. p. 263n42.

⁵² We shall see in section 14.3.7 below that although the 'mature Pyrrhonist' does not subscribe to self-cancelling arguments, he must have reached his present sceptical stance of suspension of judgement by doing so at some point in his previous dogmatic life. $\neg M^*$, and other equivalent dogmatic versions of the sceptical φωναί, could be seen as the negative conclusions reached through those arguments by the Pyrrhonist at the very moment of his conversion to scepticism (cf. also p. 277n82).

⁵³ The only way in which οὐδὲν μᾶλλον could be thought to be absolutely self-refuting is by misunderstanding its meaning. If for example one analysed it as 'For every pair of conflicting dogmatic matters p and q , it is not true that p and it is not true that q ', from the assumption of the truth of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον it would follow that neither οὐδὲν μᾶλλον nor not-οὐδὲν μᾶλλον are true, and hence that οὐδὲν μᾶλλον is not true. But it is manifest that Sextus does not use οὐδὲν μᾶλλον with this meaning. Here is a passage in which Sextus explicitly rejects something similar to the analysis above as the correct paraphrase of the sceptical οὐδὲν μᾶλλον, and suggests that it expresses the 'anairetic' or negative use the Democriteans made of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον: 'But the Sceptics and the Democriteans use the expression οὐδὲν μᾶλλον in different senses; for the latter assign it the sense that neither is the case, we the sense that we do not know whether some appearance is both or neither' (PH 1.213). Notice, incidentally, that the use of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον as a double affirmation is actually better attested for the historical Democritus (cf. e.g. Arist. *Metaph.* A 4, 985b8 and Plut. *Colot.* 1109a; on the 'positive' and 'negative' uses of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον see in particular D.L. 9.75 and Corti 2002: 17–19). According to D.L. 9.75 the Pyrrhonists used οὐδὲν μᾶλλον negatively (ἀναιρετικῶς), i.e. for a double negation: either Diogenes Laertius (or his source) are confused and imprecise (the Pyrrhonists use οὐδὲν μᾶλλον 'anairetically' only in the sense that this expression conveys the point that they deny *their assent* to either possibility, and not that both possibilities are false), or this passage testifies to a non-Sextan, most probably earlier usage of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον in the Pyrrhonian tradition (according to Bett 2000, we can find traces of an early, non-Sextan brand of Aenesidemean Pyrrhonism compatible with such usage in Diogenes Laertius, Photius and *M* 11). Such a usage, which would count as negative dogmatism in Sextus' eyes, would also be inconsistent with Diogenes' own later description of the sceptical expressions as 'confessions' of the Sceptic's mental state (cf. T133 on p. 333).

falsehood do not coincide. This asymmetry seemingly represents a problem for the interpretation I have proposed, but if we read *PH* 1.14 carefully we shall discern that the stress there is simply on reflexivity; 'Everything is false' (πάντα ἐστὶ ψευδῆ) merely *says* (λέγει) that it itself, as well as all the other things, is false. That this saying brings about a reversal does not seem to be what Sextus really cares about here (and in fact he does not claim *here* that πάντα ἐστὶ ψευδῆ is subject to περιτροπή).⁵⁴

Having clarified the argumentative role of the verb (συμ)περιγράφειν in our passages, let us try to identify its precise nuance. The verb περιγράφειν could denote, at least starting from the first century AD, that specific kind of cancellation practised on a text by copyists, correctors and philologists which we call 'expunction' or 'deletion' (see figure 4 below). While in the modern editions we find square brackets to indicate the editors' expunctions, the ancients used different procedures and diacritical marks:

A sponge may be used to delete a whole word or a line (or more). *Deletions* may be indicated by enclosing a passage in round brackets (the technical term is περιγράφειν) [περιγραφαί are the expunging round brackets]; by cancelling a letter or letters by means of a stroke drawn horizontally or obliquely through them (διαγράφειν); by placing a dot ('expunging dot') or a line above, or above and below, or to either side; or by a combination of these methods. (Turner 1987: 16, 56, italics mine).⁵⁵

I suggest that when using the compound συμπεριγράφειν in T94 and other parallel passages Sextus might have had in mind exactly the technical meaning that περιγράφειν bore among copyists and philologists of his time,⁵⁶ and that to translate συμπεριγράφειν as 'to bracket along with' in some measure can help us in understanding the arguments in which the verb occurs. The bracketing metaphor, for example, fits nicely T94; 'Nothing more', when (mis)taken as a (purported) dogmatic maxim, does

⁵⁴ More than once McPherran refers to 'Everything is false' and 'Nothing is true' as if they were sceptical expressions, but it seems clear to me that they are mentioned only to clarify, analogically, some logical feature of the φωναί, as confirmed by the fact that they do not appear in the list at *PH* 1.187–208 (pace also Linguist 1990: 71, Bonazzi 2003: 51, Schäfer 2006: 38).

⁵⁵ The first instance of περιγράφειν with the sense of 'to expunge' appears in POxy 24.2387, fr. 1: in a note (datable back to the first century AD) written in the top margin of a papyrus containing Alcman's lyrics we read 'the text was bracketed (περιεγράφω) in Aristonicus' copy, whereas it was unbracketed (ἄπεριγραπτος) in Ptolemy's'.

The physical deletion of words or lines, unlike the use of diacritical marks, usually indicates the instantaneous correction that the copyist himself did of his own mistakes during transcription.

⁵⁶ For this idea I thank Walter Cavini, who first suggested to me this possibility in a conversation in 1998. Sextus' use of (συμ)περιγράφειν with such a nuance is not odd, since in Greek literature there are a few other texts in which the philological meaning is echoed (e.g. Plut. *Alex. Fort.* 334C5–8; Ath. 5.9; Orig. in *Ev. Ioan.* 10.6; Apoll. *Dysc. Synt.* 6.3).

Expunging brackets also appear in several earlier documents (starting from the second century BC), in which they were used to indicate the deletion of names from public or commercial lists and documents (for example because of death or of the settlement of debts or other obligations).

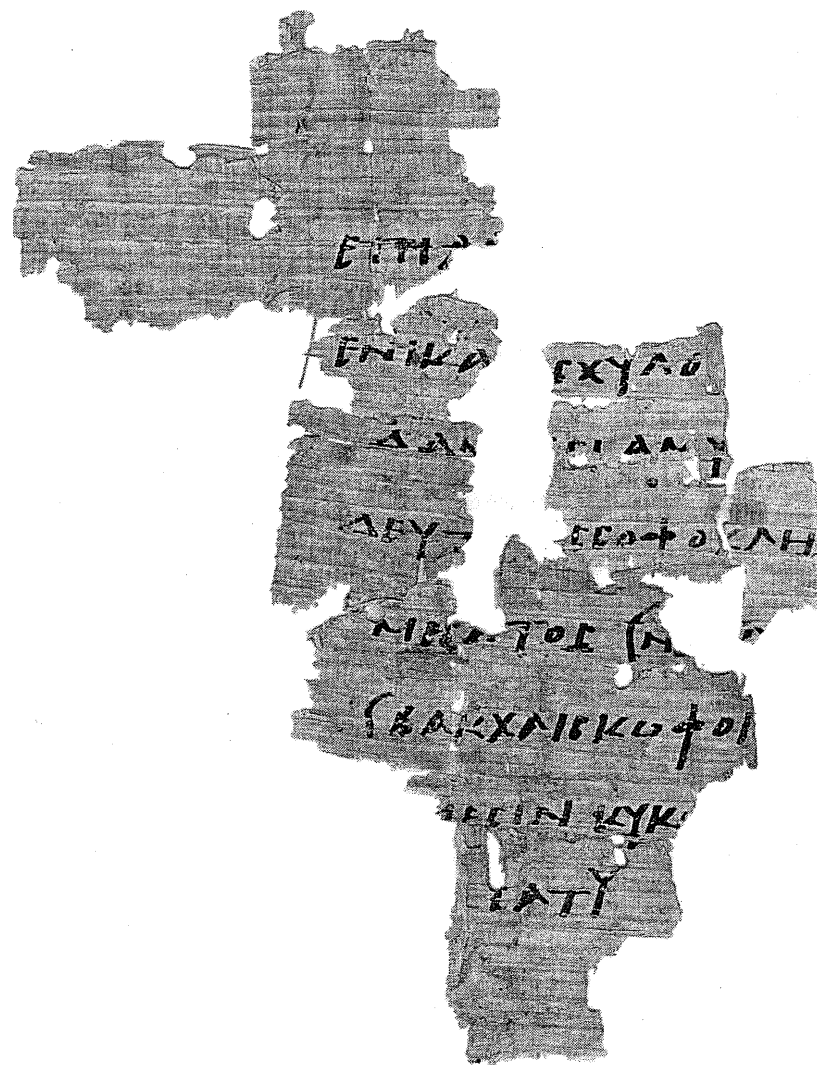


Figure 4 POxy 20.2256, fr. 3 (second-third century AD) – expunging brackets (περιγραφαί) are visible at the fifth and sixth line of the papyrus.

not cancel dogmatic beliefs (and itself) in the sense that it completely erases (or purports to erase) one's mind's contents. It brackets those dogmatic contents: it signals that they should no longer be believed to be true, and that they are now to be contemplated in a different light, i.e. with the sceptical disposition of suspension of judgement about their truth.

'Nothing more' does not say that our minds ought to be *tabulae rasae*; what is to be emptied is the set of the dogmatic theses we take to be true, or, pushing the analogy with philological practice, the 'sections' of the 'book' of our mind containing those beliefs.⁵⁷

Up to this point I have emphasised that self-bracketing, unlike absolute self-refutation, does not end with falsification of the proposition involved. Since I have argued painstakingly in parts I and II that ancient περιτροπή is not a proof of the falsehood of propositions either, however, my distinction between περιτροπή and περιγραφή must rest elsewhere; otherwise one might protest that although the ancient Pyrrhonists did not admit absolute self-refutation, they did accept a charge of something analogous to περιτροπή, which is after all the ancestor of our self-refutation.

As we have discovered, περιτροπή is, broadly speaking, a dialectical reversal whereby advancing a proposal commits one to its contradictory; the distinctive mark of περιτροπή is that at the end of the dialectical game there is something one is committed to (the contradictory not-*p* of one's initial proposal *p*), a 'residue product' of περιτροπή. At the end of the περιγραφή argument, on the contrary, we have *no* such residue: according to Sextus, one who advances οὐδὲν μᾶλλον as a dogmatic maxim is not unwittingly committing oneself, by the self-application of $\neg M^*$, to the truth of its contradictory (some dogmatic theses are more persuasive than their opposites). One is committing oneself to admitting the rational necessity of not-believing οὐδὲν μᾶλλον; but not-believing οὐδὲν μᾶλλον is not tantamount to believing not-οὐδὲν μᾶλλον. At the end of the day, not even the dogmatic asserter of $\neg M^*$ is committed to believing anything, as we have seen: his initial proposal, and the connected belief, have been bracketed, without being replaced by alternative proposals or beliefs.

I suggest that Sextus' conscious usage of the different terms περιτρέπειν (περιτροπή) for the dogmatist's charge and (συμ)περιγράφειν for the Pyrrhonist's defence does perfectly mirror this distinction in the logic of the arguments. Indisputably, περιτρέπειν and περιτροπή were terms of art in Sextus' time; nevertheless, their ordinary meaning could not but sound clear to the ears of any Greek speaker. Περιτροπή is a reversal, a turning round: if you are walking and suddenly u-turn, you are no longer heading towards your previous destination, but there is still some place towards which you are directing your steps. If you stare at a coin and you

⁵⁷ This is particularly important in light of Sextus' stress on the point that the Pyrrhonist is a life-long inquirer (ζητητικός; cf. e.g. *PH* 1.3, 1.7): while suspending judgement on *p*, he must still be able to entertain the thought that *p* (cf. also Sextus' reply to the dogmatic charge that the Sceptic cannot be an inquirer at *PH* 2.1–10).

flip it from heads to tails, you will no longer be able to see the initial side, but this does not mean that you will no longer see anything at all; you will now find in front of you the opposite one. The bracketing metaphor, on the other hand, fits nicely the distinctive feature of a περιγραφή argument: putting a text within round brackets indicates that you reject it as spurious, but by this very act you are not replacing the expunged words with any alternative (let alone opposite) text.⁵⁸

On my interpretation, therefore, it is not only through the overt similes of purgatives (cf. sections 14.2.5 and 14.3.5 below), fire (cf. section 14.3.5 below) and a ladder (cf. section 14.3.6 below) that Sextus attempts to picture a logical manoeuvre that is not, despite what McPherran (1987: 326) and most scholars believe, a reversal;⁵⁹ in the formulation of the περιγραφή argument a charming philological metaphor is hidden in the very choice of the verb (συμ)περιγράφειν.

The overall reading I have proposed hitherto receives support from the following passage:

t98 But then, if someone who holds beliefs posits what he believes as being the case, while the Sceptic utters his own expressions in such a way that potentially (δυνάμει) they are bracketed by themselves (ὑφ' ἑαυτῶν περιγράφεσθαι), then he cannot be said to hold beliefs in uttering them.⁶⁰ (*PH* 1.15)

The sceptical expressions have such a logical nature that they are *potentially*⁶¹ self-bracketing, i.e. if taken as true dogmatic maxims they become self-referring and say of themselves what they say of all the other unclear dogmatic matters (roughly, that we ought to suspend judgement about them). They become, we might say, 'self-bracketing brackets'. Thus the dogmatist can no longer protest that the Sceptic betrays his holding

⁵⁸ Of course, one can also replace the expunged text with an alternative one, but this replacement is by no means *part* of the previous act of bracketing.

⁵⁹ For nice illustrations of the conflation of self-reversal and self-expunction, which is widespread in the literature, cf. e.g. Burnyeat 1976a: 50 (the sceptical 'formulae... apply to themselves and cancel themselves, by reversal, along with all the other assertions') and Conway and Ward 1992: 193 ('self-consuming reversals').

⁶⁰ πλὴν ἄλλ' εἰ ὁ δογματίζων τίθησιν ὡς ὑπάρχον τοῦτο ὃ δογματίζει, ὃ δὲ σκεπτικὸς τὰς φωνὰς αὐτοῦ προφέρειται ὡς δυνάμει ὑφ' ἑαυτῶν περιγράφεσθαι, οὐκ ἂν ἐν τῇ προφορᾷ τούτων δογματίζειν λεχθεῖη.

Sextus employs also elsewhere in *PH* (1.78, 1.99, 3.272) the peculiar construction 'πλὴν ἄλλ' εἰ *p*, *q*', where *p* summarises conclusions reached immediately before and *q* is something previously put under scrutiny (or, at least, necessitating further confirmation) which can now be concluded or confirmed because it follows from *p* ('but then, if – as we have just seen – *p* is the case, then we can conclude that – as we had anticipated – *q*').

⁶¹ For justification of my translation of δυνάμει as 'potentially' cf. pp. 274–5. For a similar understanding of δυνάμει here cf. McPherran 1987: 295n14.

beliefs when he utters his expressions: logic itself prevents the Sceptic from dogmatising when he utters them.

14.2.4 The Pyrrhonist's actual attitude towards his *φωναί*

Having exposed the weakness of the dogmatist's charge, Sextus can now present what he takes to be, however, *the most important point* (τὸ δὲ μέγιστον) of his defence, i.e. the explanation of the actual significance of the sceptical expressions:

199 But the most important point is that in uttering these expressions he [*sc.* the Sceptic] says what appears to him (τὸ ἑαυτῷ φαινόμενον) and⁶² announces his own affection without holding beliefs (τὸ πάθος ἀπαγγέλλει τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἁδοξάστως), definitely affirming (διαβεβαιούμενος) nothing about the external things (περὶ τῶν ἔξωθεν ὑποκειμένων).⁶³ (PH 1.15)

The Sceptic's *φωναί* are 'announcements' (ἀπαγγελίαι)⁶⁴ of his own mental *πάθη* and do not express or presuppose the belief that what appears to him has any correspondence with non-evident states of affairs. The *φωναί* voice the way the Sceptic is affected in examining those unclear matters that the dogmatists assert,⁶⁵ but these affections themselves are not anything unclear, and it is not by expressing them that one could be guilty of dogmatism. Barnes has suggested that the Pyrrhonian utterances are, like Wittgenstein's *Äußerungen*, mere 'avowals', i.e. 'speech acts of a different kind from statements and affirmations'; they *express* *πάθη*, and do not describe or *state* anything at all, not even about oneself, thereby bypassing belief (1982b: 4–5). 'Honey is sweet' states something ἄδηλον, which can thereby be the object of dogmatic belief; 'Honey appears sweet to me now' voices the Pyrrhonist's subjective disposition, his present acquiescence in

⁶² I will take the καί as exegetical (cf. Fine 2003: 359–60n43).

⁶³ τὸ δὲ μέγιστον, ἐν τῇ προφορᾷ τῶν *φωνῶν* τούτων τὸ ἑαυτῷ φαινόμενον λέγει καὶ τὸ πάθος ἀπαγγέλλει τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἁδοξάστως, μηδὲν περὶ τῶν ἔξωθεν ὑποκειμένων διαβεβαιούμενος.

At PH 1.191 Sextus makes virtually the same point focusing in particular on οὐδὲν μᾶλλον: 'One should understand also that when we utter the expression "Nothing more" we do not affirm definitely that it itself is absolutely true and firm, but we say it too on the basis of what appears to us' (κακέينو δὲ χρή γινώσκειν, ὅτι προφερόμεθα τὴν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον *φωνήν* οὐ διαβεβαιούμενοι περὶ τοῦ πάντως ὑπάρχειν αὐτὴν ἀληθῆ καὶ βεβαίαν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἡμῖν καὶ περὶ αὐτῆς λέγοντες).

⁶⁴ For the use of ἀπαγγέλλειν, ἀπαγγέλλαι, ἀπαγγελτικῶς in relation to the sceptical utterances see PH 1.4, 1.15, 1.197, 1.200 (*bis*), 1.203. For Sextus' use of the adjective δηλωτικός in relation to the sceptical *φωναί* see PH 1.195, 1.197, 1.201. For the term ἐξομολογήσεις ('confessions') see D.L. 9.104 (cf. 1133 on p. 333).

⁶⁵ Cf. PH 1.187: 'When we use one of these modes or one of the modes of suspension of judgement, we utter certain expressions which manifest (μηνυτικός) a sceptical disposition and our affections'.

an involuntary *πάθος*; whether it counts as a statement or not, it is not supposed to describe any feature of 'external reality'. 'Honey is sweet no more than it is bitter' is itself to be taken as the mere acknowledgement of a *πάθος* the Pyrrhonist is experiencing (the *πάθος* of being unable to decide whether honey is – as opposed to 'appears' – sweet or bitter): a *πάθος* generated by his investigation about unclear external matters, but still his self-evident inner *πάθος*. Whether we accept Barnes's specific proposal or not, then, the Pyrrhonist is saying something about himself (how he is affected now), and he is not making assertions about any obscure feature of the external world (that honey is sweet and bitter,⁶⁶ or that it is neither sweet nor bitter,⁶⁷ or that reality has such an intrinsic indeterminacy, or human mind such an intrinsic weakness, that it is impossible to know whether honey is sweet or bitter).⁶⁸

The sceptical *φωναί*, whose utterance appears *prima facie* to compromise the Pyrrhonian project of avoiding dogmatism, are, at the end of the day, innocuous: they are the linguistic expression of that kind of *δογματίζειν lato sensu* which the Pyrrhonist has no worries about admitting and endorsing.⁶⁹ Their second-order character notwithstanding, their status does not differ from that of any first-order sceptical utterance; a status which Sextus had taken care to elucidate from the very opening of his work, through this crucial caveat:

1100 Of the sceptical way we shall give now an outline, first premising that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm definitely (διαβεβαιούμεθα) that things absolutely (πάντως) are just as we say, but on each matter we announce precisely (ιστορικῶς ἀπαγγέλλομεν) what appears to us at the time (τὸ νῦν φαινόμενον ἡμῖν).⁷⁰ (PH 1.4)

⁶⁶ This would be the 'thetic' (and possibly Protagorean) use of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον (cf. D.L. 9.75).

⁶⁷ This would be the 'anaitetic' use of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον made by the Democriteans (cf. p. 267n53).

⁶⁸ Exactly the same holds for the general formula οὐδὲν μᾶλλον (standing elliptically for the first-person report or avowal $\neg M$, and not for the dogmatic assertion $\neg M^*$).

⁶⁹ Burnyeat believes that at times the very idea of a non-epistemic, phenomenological reading of the verb φαίνεται required by a rustic interpretation of Sextan Pyrrhonism is a bluff on Sextus' part (1980: 50). According to this view, 'for every pair of conflicting unclear matters *p* and *q* I have examined, *p* appears to me now as persuasive as *q*' cannot but mean 'I am inclined to believe (or I weakly believe) now that, for every pair of conflicting unclear matters *p* and *q* I have examined, *p* is as persuasive as *q*', and thus commits the Sceptic to having at least a (weak) belief (for in-depth discussion of the two kinds of appearances cf. also Barney 1992). This challenge is too wide ranging to be taken into account here, but I believe that it does not represent a knock-out objection to the coherence of Sextan Pyrrhonism (for an interesting defence of the coherence of Pyrrhonian scepticism cf. e.g. Johnsen 2001).

⁷⁰ περὶ δὲ τῆς σκεπτικῆς ἀγωγῆς ὑποτυπωτικῶς ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος ἡμεῖς ἐροῦμεν, ἐκεῖνο προειπόντες, ὅτι περὶ οὐδενὸς τῶν λεχθησομένων διαβεβαιούμεθα ὡς οὕτως ἔχοντος πάντως καθάπερ λέγομεν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ νῦν φαινόμενον ἡμῖν ιστορικῶς ἀπαγγέλλομεν περὶ ἑκάστου.

As Fine (2003: 375) nicely puts it, Sextus claims that 'all sceptics do is issue autobiographical reports of how they are appeared to'. Any doubt that this caveat does not hold for the sceptical φωναί is banished by Sextus through his refined περιγραφή argument. Suppose the dogmatist stubbornly refuses to believe in the earnestness of the Pyrrhonist's account in T99, and continues to protest that the sceptical φωναί are not plain first-person ἀπαγγελίαί, but much more pretentious claims about the world, and that the Sceptic is therefore only a disguised 'negative meta-dogmatist';⁷¹ this dogmatist will have finally to be silent, faced with the irresistible force of logic and argument.

14.2.5 Sceptical purgatives

We now proceed to examine a second relevant passage, to see whether it can provide a validation of my reading of PH 1.13–15:

ΤΙΟΙ Of all the sceptical φωναί, one should understand first of all that we [*sc.* the Sceptics] do not affirm definitely (οὐ διαβεβαιούμεθα) that they are absolutely (πάντως) true, since we say that they can (δύνασθαι) eliminate (ἀναιρεῖσθαι) themselves, being bracketed along with (συμπεριγραφόμενος) what they are said of, just as purgative drugs do not only drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours.⁷² (PH 1.206)

The first part of the passage seems almost a *resumé* of what we have commented on above; and δύνασθαι, I submit, is a crucial exegetical clue, by reminding us of T98's δυνάμει. The φωναί are not self-bracketing *tout court*, but they are such *potentially*, only if (mis)interpreted as 'absolutely true'; in this case (and only in this case) they do away with themselves. One might object that, just as δυνάμει did not need to indicate potentiality in T98, but was best understood, in accordance with the Sextan usage, as 'implicitly', here δύνασθαι might indicate stable capacity and not simple

⁷¹ I adopt here Barnes' jargon: 'a metadogmatist is someone who holds views about the cognitive status of certain propositions – that we do or we do not, can or cannot, know or believe that certain things are thus and so. Metadogmatism is quite distinct from negative dogmatism – although the two things are frequently conflated in the literature ... and negative metadogmatism is a special case of negative dogmatism' (1992: 425, 4172). I do not include first-person declarations of suspension of judgement or disavowals of knowledge, however general they may be, under the label 'negative meta-dogmatism'.

⁷² περί πασῶν γὰρ τῶν σκεπτικῶν φωνῶν ἐκεῖνο χρή προειληφέναι, ὅτι περί τοῦ ἀληθεῖς αὐτὰς εἶναι πάντως οὐ διαβεβαιούμεθα, ὅπου γὰρ καὶ ὑφ' αὐτῶν αὐτὰς ἀναιρεῖσθαι λέγομεν δύνασθαι, συμπεριγραφόμενους ἐκείνοις περί ὧν λέγονται, καθάπερ τὰ καθαρτικά τῶν φαρμάκων οὐ μόνον τοὺς χυμοὺς ὑπεξαίρει τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑαυτὰ τοῖς χυμοῖς συνεξάγει.

potentiality.⁷³ However, if this were the case two terms with the same root would be employed with different meanings in clearly identical contexts. Moreover, on this reading one might have expected to find δύναται also with reference to the purgatives, for the sake of symmetry: just as the sceptical φωναί, whenever asserted, have the peculiar capacity of (invariably) eliminating themselves along with the things of which they are said, so the purgatives, whenever ingested, have the peculiar capacity of (invariably) expelling themselves along with the noxious bodily humours.⁷⁴

The verb ἀναιρεῖσθαι has to be taken here as broadly as possible. There are many ways in which things can 'eliminate' other things (or themselves), these different ways depending, to begin with, on the nature of the things involved in the (self-)elimination. For example, one can eliminate a word from a text by erasing it, by drawing a stroke through it, or, more gently, by putting it within round (or square) brackets; merely saying that one has eliminated a word leaves unanswered how one did so. 'The sceptical expressions eliminate themselves'; one could reasonably ask: 'How?' They could do so, for example, by being reversed into their contradictory (i.e. by περιτροπή), or by entailing that they themselves are worthy of belief no more than their opposite (i.e. by bracketing themselves, περιγραφή). In our case we do not need to ask: Sextus tells us that the φωναί eliminate themselves by bracketing themselves. We might say that ἀναιρεῖν is the genus, περιτρέπειν and (συμ)περιγράφειν its species.

In the second part of ΤΙΟΙ a simile is introduced which we have not met before, and which substitutes for the analogy with 'Everything is false' of T94. I judge the simile of purgatives much more appropriate than that analogy which, as we have seen, can be a source of misunderstanding by bringing into the picture a concept, falsehood, irrelevant to the case of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον. Here is how the simile can be spelled out. Suppose that the Sceptic dogmatically believed and asserted οὐδὲν μᾶλλον, as his adversaries complain. In this case, οὐδὲν μᾶλλον (= ¬M*) would behave like purgatives: the Sceptic has 'introduced' οὐδὲν μᾶλλον into his mind, among his other beliefs, like someone introducing purgatives into his diseased body, among the harmful humours. Οὐδὲν μᾶλλον brackets all the Pyrrhonist's beliefs, saying that there is no good reason to believe them (not because they are false, but because they are truly and perfectly equipollent with their opposites). In the same way, the purgatives act on the humours and expel

⁷³ Many thanks to Anthony Long and Jacques Brunschwig for raising this objection.

⁷⁴ For a similar use of the verb δύνασθαι in a parallel passage cf. p. 291. Apart from these small linguistic clues, there are of course more general requirements of coherence in the interpretation of Sextus' strategy which make me incline towards taking δυνάμει and δύνασθαι to express potentiality.

them from the body (the purging of the humours is the counterpart of the bracketing of beliefs in the mind). But when οὐδὲν μᾶλλον says that all our beliefs ought to be abandoned, it is also making this very claim about itself, being itself *ex hypothesi* a dogmatic belief (so the dogmatist charges), and brackets itself too. Accordingly, the purgatives expel themselves along with the humours, since they presumably would end up acting as harmful agents if retained in the body. Also οὐδὲν μᾶλλον, if retained in the mind as a belief (unbracketed), would poison it with negative meta-dogmatism and harmfully undermine the Sceptic's ἐποχή and ἀταραξία.⁷⁵ The simile of purgatives, like the philological metaphor of bracketing, provides a vivid illustration of the distinctive feature of Sextus' περιγραφή (vs. περιτροπή): at the end of the day, no dangerous dogmatic residue remains in the Pyrrhonist's mind, even under the (false) assumption that the Sceptic dogmatically believes, and asserts, 'Nothing more' in the sense of $\neg M^*$.

But again, and more fundamentally, the truth is that the Sceptics by no means intend to advance dogmatic maxims when uttering their φωναί:

ΠΙΟ2 We say what appears to us (τὸ φαινόμενον ἡμῖν) and do not make definite assertions (διαβεβαιωτικῶς) about the nature of external things.⁷⁶ (PH 1.208)

14.2.6 Interim conclusions

My interpretation has ruled out the concepts of absolute self-refutation and περιτροπή from two of the passages alleged to attest to Sextus' acceptance of self-refutation. Those concepts have been replaced with the one of 'self-bracketing', but self-bracketing is not a logical property to be attributed to the φωναί *tout court*: the sceptical expressions, as the Sceptic understands them, are neither self-reversing nor self-bracketing, all this subtle talk about that particular form of self-elimination which I baptised περιγραφή being prompted by the particular *dialectical context* I have reconstructed.

⁷⁵ Or, to put it better, the newly acquired ἐποχή and ἀταραξία of the new-born Sceptic (cf. n. 82 below).

For a strikingly analogous, but more explicit, formulation of this idea see the discussion between Buddha and Kāśyapa quoted by Candrakīrti to illustrate Nāgārjuna's point that 'emptiness' is a purgative which gets rid of all views, but must not become itself a view (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 13.8):

'It is as if, Kāśyapa, there were a sick person, and a doctor were to give that person a purgative drug, and that purgative drug which had gone to the gut, having eliminated all the person's bad humours, were not itself expelled. What do you think, Kāśyapa, would that person then be free of disease?' 'No Lord, the illness of the person would be more intense if the purgative drug eliminated all the bad humours but were not expelled from the gut.' (Translation Pandeya 1989, slightly modified)

⁷⁶ τὸ φαινόμενον ἡμῖν φαμεν καὶ οὐχὶ διαβεβαιωτικῶς περὶ τῆς φύσεως τῶν ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένων ἀποφαινόμεθα.

Self-bracketing is a complex defence manoeuvre which Sextus adopts against the charge of disguised dogmatism (and against the most relentless supporters of that charge). In the actual use which the Sceptic makes of them, his expressions are not self-bracketing, because they are not self-referring either; since Sextus explicitly says that they regard only unclear things, to be self-referring they themselves should be ἀδηλα (truth-claims about external states of affairs).⁷⁷ But Sextus, time and again, reminds us that they simply 'announce' the Sceptic's affections, and that this is the main reason why the Sceptic is not guilty of dogmatism: a reminder which would be utterly inconsistent with the recognition of the unqualifiedly reflexive and self-bracketing nature of the φωναί.⁷⁸ One might reply that we should admit that Sextus was inconsistent, or perhaps was merely juxtaposing unrelated defences of the Pyrrhonian stance in a way typical of his argumentative method,⁷⁹ if at any rate this is what emerges from careful scrutiny of his work.⁸⁰ While admitting that the refined strategy of the περιγραφή argument which I have reconstructed is not transparent in Sextus' Greek prose, I maintain it is not the result of an overdose of charity, in light both of concrete textual clues⁸¹ and of the only too apparent weakness of Sextus' position on its standard reading. For suppose, again, that self-bracketing were to be considered a mechanism at work whenever the Sceptic utters his characteristic formulae; Sextus' reply to the dogmatist's charge would be pretty hopeless: 'I, that very Sceptic who is always announcing that I live without beliefs, ardently wish to dogmatise by asserting my slogans, but I cannot: every time I assert them dogmatically, unfortunately they bracket themselves. So, at least don't accuse me of dogmatising!'

The Sceptic would be no longer a disguised negative meta-dogmatist; he would be a self-styled bankrupt negative meta-dogmatist.⁸²

⁷⁷ Contra Spinelli 1991: 63.

⁷⁸ Cf. Burnyeat 1980: 5052: 'Notice that it is for these higher-level generalizations [*sc.* the φωναί] that Sextus invokes the defence of cheerful self-refutation... Self-refutation presupposes that the propositions do make a truth-claim. Sextus would not need (and *could not use*) the defence if the generalizations were *really* the expressions of appearance which he *simultaneously* claims them to be' (italics mine). For the failure to appreciate the problematic relationship between the two accounts cf. Stough's words: 'The Skeptic doctrine is indeed self-refuting, but only after it has destroyed all the arguments of traditional philosophy. [Note:] Another way of meeting this type of objection was to remind the critic that Skeptic utterances are no more than reports of their own experiences' (1969: 146; italics mine).

⁷⁹ Cf. PH 3.280-1 and section 2 of chapter 15.

⁸⁰ I thank Jacques Brunschwig for making me aware of this possible line of criticism: my indications of the περιγραφή argument are 'non confirmées par le texte de Sextus, parce qu'elles représentent peut-être ce que Sextus pourrait dire ou devrait dire, mais non pas, me semble-t-il, ce qu'il dit.'

⁸¹ Cf. the use of δύναμι (798) and δύνασθαι (1101). Further and stronger corroboration will come from my analysis of the parallel strategy as applied to the arguments against proof in section 14.3.

⁸² One might object that the Pyrrhonist is in fact depicted by Sextus himself as a bankrupt dogmatist (albeit not a negative one) at PH 1.28-9, where the famous simile of the painter Apelles is presented.

14.3 SELF-BRACKETING ARGUMENTS: WHERE DOES THE LADDER TAKE US? (M 8.463–81)

An analysis parallel to that offered above for *PH* 1.13–15 and 1.206–8 can also be applied to the two passages containing Sextus' alleged acceptance of the self-refutation of the sceptical 'proofs against proof'. As I pointed out in section 14.1 above, the key word of these passages, συμπεριγράφειν, is the same as we found in the passages concerning the sceptical φωναί; it will be clear at the end of our reading that this is not mere chance.

The first similarity between the two pairs of passages is that both can be properly understood only within the dialectical context in which Sextus locates them. I start then with an outline of this context.⁸³

14.3.1 The dogmatist's dilemma and the περιτροπή charge

We are almost at the end of the second book of *Against the Logicians*; having presented a battery of arguments against the existence of proof (ἀπόδειξις),⁸⁴ Sextus invites his reader to have a look also at the opposite dogmatic one (presumably, in defence of the existence of proof):

τιο3 The dogmatic philosophers think that he who maintains that proof does not exist incurs self-reversal (αὐτὸν ὑφ' αὐτοῦ περιτρέπεσθαι), and that he affirms proof by the very means by which he denies it. Hence in withstanding the Sceptics they also say: 'He who says that proof does not exist says that proof does not exist either by using a bare and unproved assertion or by proving such a thing by argument. And if it is by using bare assertion, none of those who are receiving the proof will trust him, who uses bare assertion, but he will be checked by the contradictory assertion, when someone says that proof exists. But if it is by proving that proof does not exist (for they say so),

However, that passage refers to the Pyrrhonist's sceptical conversion from his original dogmatic inclinations (the Pyrrhonist is a 'natural-born dogmatist': cf. *PH* 1.12), and not to something still occurring to the 'mature' Pyrrhonist (cf. p. 267n52 and section 14.3.7 below). The difference between the 'immature' and the 'mature' Pyrrhonist is emphasised effectively by Bailey 1990 and 2002: 256–66.

⁸³ I shall focus on the final passage of *Against the Logicians* which offers a much more extensive and detailed account than the parallel *PH* 2 version, pointing out only the most significant correspondences and differences.

⁸⁴ I am not dealing here with the sceptical arguments against proof (on which see Barnes 1980); my analysis will focus only on the metalogical issues raised by the use the Pyrrhonist makes of them.

For the dogmatic definition of that ἀπόδειξις whose existence Sextus attacks, cf. e.g. *PH* 2.143: 'A proof, then, ought to be an argument (λόγος), which is conclusive (συνακτικώς) and true (ἀληθής) and has a non-evident (ἔδηλον) conclusion (συμπέρασμα) which is revealed by the power of the premisses (λήμματα); and for this reason a proof is said to be an argument which, by way of agreed premisses and in virtue of inference, reveals an unclear conclusion (ἐπιφορά)'. For the Stoic definitions of ἀπόδειξις cf. Brunschwig 1980.

he has thereby admitted (ὡμολόγησε) that proof exists; for the argument which proves that proof does not exist is a proof that proof exists'.⁸⁵ (*M* 8.463–4)

The dilemmatic structure of this περιτροπή charge should be familiar by now: in chapter 10 of part II we have seen it at work against the deniers of the existence of cause and sign. If the denier of the existence of proof limits himself to bare assertion, he will not be credible (no more, at least, than anyone who merely counter-asserts that proof exists).⁸⁶ It is properly in the second horn that the dogmatist's περιτροπή charge resides:⁸⁷ whoever supports his denial of proof by offering proof of it will be thereby admitting the existence of proof. Also familiar from our previous discussion should be the problem of establishing the precise logic of this charge: is this a charge of strict pragmatic self-refutation or of what I have called, with Passmore, *ad hominem* self-refutation? The same considerations which I proposed on p. 170 for the argument in τ54 apply here: while the conclusion of the περιτροπή, the admission of the existence of proof, is compatible with a merely *ad hominem* strategy ('since you advance what *you* take to be a proof of your claim, you are yourself admitting the existence of at least one proof'), Sextus' wording suggests actual, and not merely purported, proof of the non-existence of proof, which is enough to guarantee a stronger

⁸⁵ οἴονται γὰρ οἱ δογματικοὶ τῶν φιλοσόφων τὸν ἀξιούντα μὴ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν αὐτὸν ὑφ' αὐτοῦ περιτρέπεσθαι, καὶ δι' ὧν ἀναρεῖ ταύτην, διὰ τούτων αὐτὴν ὀρίζειν. ὅθεν καὶ ἀντικαθιστάμενοι τοῖς σκεπτικοῖς φασίν· ὁ λέγων μὴδὲν εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν ἥτοι φιλή καὶ ἀναποδείκτω χρώμενος φάσει λέγει μὴδὲν ὑπάρχειν ἀπόδειξιν, ἢ λόγῳ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀποδεικνύς. καὶ εἰ μὲν φιλή φάσει προσχρώμενος, οὐθεὶς αὐτῷ πιστεύσει τῶν τὴν ἀπόδειξιν παραδεχομένων, φιλή φάσει χρώμενος, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἀντικειμένης ἐπισχεθήσεται φάσεως, εἰπόντος τινὸς εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν. εἰ δὲ ἀποδεικνύς τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν (τοῦτο γὰρ φασίν), αὐτόθεν ὡμολόγησε τὸ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν· ὁ γὰρ δεικνύς λόγῳ τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις τοῦ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν.

I have followed the text established by Kochalsky and Mutschmann, expunging λόγοι, which appears after δογματικοί in the manuscripts *Laurentianus* 85, 11 and *Parisinus* 1964 (the *lectio* of *Laurentianus* 85, 19 is λόγον). Bury adopts the text established by Bekker, with λόγον after φιλοσόφων, and translates 'the argument which maintains the non-existence of proof is overthrown by itself' (1935: 479). Burnyeat adopts the same text, but criticises Bury's translation, anticipating some of the central points of my interpretation: 'Bury's "reversal of the argument" is wrong, if not *unmeaning*: what gets reversed is not an argument but a proposition. Again, it should be a *statement* maintaining the nonexistence of proof, not an argument, as Bury's translation has it, that Sextus adduces . . . in connection with the Stoic charge that it is self-refuting (cf. *PH* 2.179). There is argument about it, which Sextus in the immediate sequel terms λόγος, and later he considers whether to admit that this argument does away with itself [. . .], but for that he *does not use the vocabulary of reversal*' (1976a: 49n9, italics mine).

⁸⁶ As Bett (2005: 180n134) notes, Sextus' 'none of those who are receiving the proof' (οὐθεὶς [. . .] τῶν τὴν ἀπόδειξιν παραδεχομένων) is misleading phrasing, 'since the argument presents demonstration and bare assertion as alternatives'.

⁸⁷ For a possible answer to the question of why περιτροπή seems to be presented as if it also embraced the first horn of the dilemma cf. pp. 175–6.

pragmatic self-refutation ('by proving his claim that proof does not exist, the Sceptic has thereby produced a proof of the existence of proof, falsifying his own claim').⁸⁸

Pragmatic self-refutation also underlies, *prima facie*, the second horn of a slightly different dilemmatic argument formulated immediately below:

ΤΙΟ4 And, in general, the argument against proof (ὁ κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγος) either is a proof or is not a proof; and if it is not a proof, it is not credible (ἄπιστος), but if it is a proof, proof exists.⁸⁹ (*M* 8.465)

The λόγος against proof cannot be here the statement 'Proof does not exist'; it must be the *argument* against the existence of proof (adopting McPherran's acronym, PAP). That the Sceptic has argued for the non-existence of proof is thus being taken for granted here, unlike in ΤΙΟ3, and the issue is now whether his argument is or is not a proof:⁹⁰ if it is not a proof, it will be unconvincing; but if it is a proof, proof does exist. It is difficult to deny that actual, and not merely declared, proof of the non-existence of proof seems to be presupposed in the second horn, for a pragmatic περιτροπή which would establish the existence of proof. However, this raises two other familiar problems. First, such a pragmatic περιτροπή actually could never occur, since a sound proof of the non-existence of sound proofs is something impossible, a monstrous logical *chimaera*, at least if a sound proof must possess all the characteristics listed in note 84 above, including, crucially, a true conclusion⁹¹ (for some key qualification of this diagnosis see, however, section 14.3.7 below). Second, there would be an asymmetry

⁸⁸ According to Burnyeat, pragmatic self-refutation must be at stake here, since merely purported proof of the non-existence of proof 'does not definitely establish the reality of proof; it only concedes to be true the very thing I am at the same time denying' (1976a: 54). However, the simple *concession* of the existence of proof is exactly the stated outcome of the περιτροπή (Burnyeat's diagnosis is in fact based on the slightly different formulation of the argument at 8.465 (ΤΙΟ4 below)). McPherran also believes that genuine proof, and thus strict pragmatic self-refutation, are assumed here. La Sala's (2005: 139) reference to 'absolute Selbstwiderlegung' is incorrect in this context.

⁸⁹ καὶ καθόλου ὁ κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγος ἢ τοι ἀπόδειξις ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις· καὶ εἰ μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις, ἄπιστός ἐστιν, εἰ δὲ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις, ἀπόδειξις ἔστιν.

⁹⁰ The parallel passage in *PH* (2.185) begins at once by formulating this second dilemma: 'The dogmatists, attempting to establish the contrary, say that the arguments propounded against proof are either demonstrative or non-demonstrative; and if they are not demonstrative, then they cannot show that proof does not exist; but if they are demonstrative, then they themselves conclude the existence of proof by περιτροπή' (οἱ δὲ δογματικοὶ τούναντιον κατασκευάζοντες φασιν ὅτι ἢ τοι ἀποδεικτικοὶ εἰσιν οἱ κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως ἡρωτημένοι λόγοι ἢ οὐκ ἀποδεικτικοί· καὶ εἰ μὲν οὐκ ἀποδεικτικοί, οὐ δύνανται δεικνύειν ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀπόδειξις· εἰ δὲ ἀποδεικτικοὶ εἰσιν, αὐτοὶ οὗτοι τὴν ὑπόστασιν τῆς ἀποδείξεως ἐκ περιτροπῆς εἰσάγουσιν).

⁹¹ This might be reflected in the (otherwise difficult to explain) parenthesis 'for they say so', towards the end of ΤΙΟ3: if the Sceptic says that proof does not exist by proving that it does not exist (as the dogmatists quite *improperly* put it) then he concedes the existence of proof. As we shall see, a more appropriate way to formulate their charge would have been 'by *purporting* to prove that it does not exist'.

in the dilemma, since the remaining possibility, expressed in the first horn, is not enough for, and indeed cannot be aimed at, proving the existence of proof: that the sceptical arguments against proof are not probative is far from entailing, by itself, that proof does exist.⁹²

In light of the methodological guidelines I have acknowledged on p. 171, it would be hasty to proclaim that, despite appearances, in ΤΙΟ4 Sextus cannot be sketching a pragmatic self-refutation argument, simply because such an argument would be too difficult for us to swallow. Yet the difficulties I have signalled encourage us to explore alternatives. At this advanced stage of our inquiry into ancient self-refutation strategies, one in particular suggests itself instantly. Given what we have observed more than once in similar contexts, it is not strained to speculate that the argument in ΤΙΟ4 might be a compressed formulation of a dilemma to be proposed in a dialectical exchange. The Sceptic has offered an argument concluding that proof does not exist. The dogmatist presses him: 'Is your argument a proof, or not?' Suppose the Sceptic answers 'no'; by doing so, he will be losing any credibility (his argument will not generate persuasion as to the truth of its conclusion). Alternatively, the Sceptic can answer 'yes, my argument is a proof', thus immediately dooming himself to reversal, i.e. to the *admission* that, at the end of the day, (at least one) proof does exist. Either way, he is in bad shape, not because of some truth which the very existence of his argument reveals, but because of what he has admitted about it.⁹³

This approach, which will find indirect confirmation below in section 14.3.2, would also help to solve the difficulties posed by the subsequent constructive dilemma propounded by 'some people' at *M* 8.466 (ἐνιοὶ δὲ καὶ οὕτω συνερωτῶσιν):

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| (1) If proof exists, proof exists | $p \rightarrow p$ |
| (2) If proof does not exist, proof exists | $\neg p \rightarrow p$ |
| (3) Either proof exists or it does not exist | $p \vee \neg p$ |
| (4) Therefore, proof exists | p^{94} |

The schema underlying this argument appears to be a *Consequentia Mirabilis* in the form $\neg p \rightarrow p \vdash p$, expanded with the addition of the

⁹² In fact, this would not even seem to be sufficient to force an *admission* of the existence of proof by the Sceptic in a dialectical exchange unless we imported the kind of considerations underlying Sextus' and Zeno's arguments (τ56 and τ57) which we have analysed in chapter 10 (pp. 175–6): if your dialectical role is that of trying to refute a certain thesis, your failure to bring home your negative point is already the victory of your opponent and of the thesis he is defending (in this case a 'default' position which is thus confirmed).

⁹³ We shall see shortly that a third possible reply is omitted here.

⁹⁴ The same argument occurs in the parallel *PH* passage (2.186), where we also find a succinct description of its logic in quite formal terms: 'whatever follows contradictories is not only true, but also necessary' (τὸ τοῖς ἀντικειμένοις ἐπόμενον οὐ μόνον ἀληθές ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖον).

two truistic premisses (1) and (3). In part II, chapter 10 I discussed similar anti-sceptical dilemmas which can be attributed to the Stoics, and denounced their problematic incompatibility with 'Aristotle's Thesis' (AT) and 'Chrysippus' Thesis' (CT), which, I argued, might have been defining features of the standard Stoic conception of conditional propositions. In the same context I emphasised the irrelevance of the proposed justifications for the crucial premisses of those dilemmas (which, if taken literally, seem hopelessly false). The present dilemma is no exception: premiss (2) is true – according to Sextus' dogmatists – because

τ105 the very argument which proves that proof does not exist, if it is demonstrative, confirms the existence of proof.⁹⁵ (*M* 8.467)

This would represent a decent reason for (2) only on the tacit, disputable and question-begging assumption that proof could be non-existent only if it were demonstrably so, i.e. if there were a proof of its non-existence.⁹⁶ But if one is ready to supply such an unstated assumption⁹⁷ to restore, if only partially, the plausibility of the dilemma, why not reconstruct instead a dialectical framework which is explicitly outlined or strongly suggested in the case of analogous arguments and, more generally, was the default background of ancient 'logic'?⁹⁸ Notice also that our dilemma is introduced as, literally, something *asked* (συνερωτώσιν). In the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic age the use of the technical term συνερωτᾶν cannot guarantee the presence of a live dialectical context for the argument 'asked', since sometimes it is only a relic of the dialectical origin of ancient reflection on logic; however its use, here and elsewhere,⁹⁹ is a tempting clue in favour of a dialectical transposition and expansion of the dilemma along the lines I sketched on p. 181: 'Do you say that proof exists or that it does not exist? If you answer that it exists, you are already on my side; if you answer

⁹⁵ αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ δεικνὺς λόγος τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν ἀποδεικτικός ὢν βεβαίῳ τὸ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν.

⁹⁶ Cf. p. 178 for similar justifications for the key premisses of the analogous anti-sceptical dilemmas.

⁹⁷ I can only signal here in passing that some such assumption would appear more palatable within a modern intuitionistic framework.

⁹⁸ As Burnyeat reminds us, 'logic at this [sc. Sextus'] period had not yet lost its connection with dialectic and disputation' (1976a: 55), and in Stoic parlance the study of what we would call 'logic' was a part of διαλεκτική (in turn a part of λογική), which was sometimes defined as 'the science of correct discussion in regard to discourses conducted by question and answer' (D.L. 7.42). Long and Sedley remark that 'the Stoic view of argument had a dialectical background in which each premise was posed as a question to an interlocutor and required his agreement. Despite the great formality imposed by the logical handbooks, this dialectical aspect was never lost sight of. Arguments are standardly "asked", not just stated, and although the texts only rarely set out the premises in interrogative form the reader is nevertheless expected to take them that way' (Long and Sedley 1987: vol. 1, 218). For a laudable stress on the dialectical aspects of Stoic logic cf. Gourinat 2000: 9–107; for discussion of the intrinsically 'dialectical' nature of Stoic logic cf. Castagnoli 2010.

⁹⁹ Συνερωτᾶν is used in the three other occurrences of the same schema at *PH* 2.131, 2.186 and *M* 8.281 (cf. p. 177).

that it does not exist, you'd better produce at least an argument, and a demonstrative one, if you hope to persuade me; but once you have agreed to advance a proof of your view, you have thereby admitted that some proof does exist; in any case, therefore, you are bound to agree with me that proof exists (unless you give up serious discussion with me, by limiting yourself to bare assertion)¹⁰⁰.

(1) $q \rightarrow p$	If <you answer that> proof exists, <you yourself admit that> proof exists
(2) $r \leftrightarrow s \wedge s \rightarrow p$	If <you answer that> proof does not exist, <you must advance a proof in support of your claim, and thereby admit that> proof exists
(3) $q \vee r$	Either <you answer that> proof exists or <you answer that> proof does not exist
(4) p	Therefore, <in any case you yourself admit that> proof exists

Granted, in the context of the dispute over the existence of sound proofs, the assumption that in order to successfully support one's thesis one must produce a sound proof of it might appear to beg the question no less blatantly than the different assumption required by a more literal interpretation; nonetheless, it is at least an assumption we have met time and again in Sextus' reports of the dogmatists' self-refutation arguments, including, only a few lines above, τ103.

Sextus, however, does not focus on the compressed dilemma of *M* 8.466; his reply will be aimed at the previous one (τ104) and at the charge of περιτροπή embedded in its second horn.

14.3.2 The returned dilemma

Sextus' reply consists in putting the burden of τ104's dilemma on its proposer, embedding it in a second dilemma. Suppose the dogmatist declares himself unable to answer his own question, i.e. cannot say whether *PAP* is demonstrative or not;¹⁰¹ in this case, he ought to be indulgent towards the

¹⁰⁰ Of course the occurrence of συνερωτᾶν *alone* cannot guarantee that the dilemma was expanded in the way I have proposed. One might argue that all the dialectic there was simply amounted to asking the interlocutor's preliminary assent to each premiss and to the conclusion, formulated exactly as they appear: 'Is it the case that if proof exists, proof exists?' 'Yes.' 'Is it the case that if proof does not exist, proof exists?' 'Yes.' . . .

¹⁰¹ I disagree with McPherran: Sextus is not 'requesting that he [sc. the dogmatist] produce a non-dilemmatic proof that the Skeptic's *PAP* is unsound' (1987: 300). Sextus is just asking him to *answer*

Sceptic, and let him leave the problem unsolved (*M* 8.470). Suppose, on the other hand, that the dogmatist takes up the challenge. If he answers that the Sceptic's argument was not a proof, from that it will not be possible to show that proof does not exist, or to conclude that, since *PAP* was a proof, proof does exist, by *περιτροπή* (*M* 8.471).¹⁰² If the dogmatist, on the contrary, grasps the second horn of his own dilemma, answering that *PAP* was a proof, hoping by that to show that the Sceptic in propounding *PAP* has involuntarily confirmed the existence of proof by *περιτροπή*, he will be thereby conceding that the *PAP*'s conclusion ('Proof does not exist') is true, by the definition of proof. Again, the dogmatist, by saying that *PAP* is demonstrative, will *no more* affirm than deny the existence of proof (*M* 8.472),¹⁰³ obtaining the same result as he would reach by grasping the first horn: equipollence of opposite theses.¹⁰⁴ Thus, no positive confirmation of the existence of proof comes to the dogmatist on the cheap, from the mere fact that the Sceptic has argued against it.

Before proceeding, a comment is in order: the way the returned dilemma is expressed and constructed, starting from the idea itself that it *can* be returned, proves what I could only conjecture above: a dialectical exchange had to be implicitly presupposed in the background of *τιο4*. The second horn of the dogmatist's dilemma was not meant to be a very unpromising proof of the existence of proof by strict pragmatic self-refutation, but a *περιτροπή* argument aimed at defeating the Sceptic and having him admit the existence of proof. But if *τιο4*'s argument turned out to be an extremely elliptical formulation of a more complex and satisfactory dialectical manoeuvre, the odds that the following cognate constructive dilemma at 8.466, apparently pivoting on a formal deduction by

whether *PAP* is or is not a proof; he is just returning the very same dilemma as the dogmatist put to him (the dogmatist had not question-beggingly asked the Sceptic to *prove* that *PAP* is a proof).

¹⁰² εἰ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις, οὐκ ἐνέσται ἐξ αὐτοῦ διδάσκειν ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις, οὐδὲ λέγειν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ λόγος ἀπόδειξις ὅτι [οὐκ] ἔσται ἡ ἀπόδειξις. Beginning from Heintz, modern editors delete both the third and the fourth οὐκ in the passage above. I retain the third οὐκ for two reasons:

(1) the double expunction makes the clause that follows οὐδὲ virtually identical in meaning to that which precedes it and the repetition would be odd;

(2) as we shall see below, retaining the third οὐκ makes the conclusion of the passage parallel to that of the one which immediately follows.

¹⁰³ οὕτω γὰρ ἀποδεικτικὸν θέλοντες ἀποδείξαι τὸν κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγον, οὐ μᾶλλον αὐτὴν τιθέασιν ἢ ἀναιροῦσιν. No parallel argument occurs in *PH*, but cf. *PH* 2.133 (on which see Annas and Barnes 2000: 101n198) for an analogous returned dilemma countering the anti-sceptical dilemma at *PH* 2.131 (cf. p. 171n34).

¹⁰⁴ In one case the two theses ('Proof exists' and 'Proof does not exist') are equipollent because *neither* of them follows from the assumption ('*PAP* is not a proof'); in the other one, because *both* of them follow from the assumption ('*PAP* is a proof').

Consequentia Mirabilis, also hides such a manoeuvre, as I had speculated, increase dramatically. And with them the odds increase that the same holds good for the three other anti-sceptical dilemmas analysed in chapter 10 of part II, and perhaps for other analogous inferential patterns as well.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the odds of finding in antiquity some non-dialectical self-refutation argument aimed at proving the truth or falsehood of a proposition on the basis of *CM* or its relatives drop severely.

14.3.3 The Pyrrhonist's actual attitude towards his arguments

Now that the dogmatist has tackled his own dilemma, albeit unsuccessfully, he might reclaim an answer from the Pyrrhonist. In this case, Sextus writes, a 'safe' answer will be available:

τιο6 For they [*sc.* the Pyrrhonists] will say that the argument against proof is merely persuasive (*πιθανόν*) and that at the moment (*πρὸς τὸ παρόν*) it persuades them (*πείθειν αὐτούς*) and draws them towards assent (*ἐπ'αγέσθαι συγκατάθεσιν*), but that they do not know whether it will still do so later on because of the variableness of the human mind.¹⁰⁶ (*M* 8.473)

This answer is safe from dogmatic objections for two reasons:

- (1) even if the dogmatist can prove that the argument against proof is not sound (and hence is not a proof), he will not contradict the Pyrrhonist, who has not definitely affirmed (*διαβεβαιοῦσθαι*) of the argument that it is sound, but only that it pulls him towards assent¹⁰⁷ with a certain persuasive force (*M* 8.474);¹⁰⁸
- (2) if the dogmatist attempts to deny this present mental *πάθος* of the Pyrrhonist, he will be rash; as nobody can persuade by argument a man who feels pleasure that he does not feel pleasure, so nobody can persuade the man who feels persuaded, to a certain degree, that he does not feel persuaded (*M* 8.475).¹⁰⁹

Furthermore – Sextus adds – if the Sceptic had asserted that proof does not exist, he might be refuted by one who shows that proof exists; but

¹⁰⁵ Cf. e.g. part II chapter 11.

¹⁰⁶ φήσουσι γὰρ τὸν κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγον πιθανὸν εἶναι μόνον καὶ πρὸς τὸ παρόν πείθειν αὐτούς καὶ ἐπ'αγέσθαι συγκατάθεσιν, ἀγνοεῖν δὲ εἰ καὶ αὐθις ἔσται τοιοῦτος διὰ τὸ πολὺτροπον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης διανοίας.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the Stoic definition of *πιθανόν* ἀξίωμα at D.L. 7.75. For Carneades' similar account cf. S.E. *M* 7.166–75.

¹⁰⁸ On the concept of 'argumentative persuasiveness' in Sextus Empiricus cf. Machuca 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Sextus ignores the possibility that the denial could amount to a charge of insincerity of the Sceptic's report. See also *M* 11.148–9.

the Pyrrhonist simply put forward the arguments against proof, without assenting to them.

Various clues recall Sextus' treatment of the sceptical *φωναί*. Here the dogmatist faces the Sceptic with a dilemma in which is embedded a self-refutation charge; there, we found the dogmatist charging the Sceptic with holding beliefs, behaviour that would betray the failure of the Pyrrhonist's project. In the one case the Sceptic would incur *περιτροπή*, denying the existence of proof but at the same time affirming its existence by admitting using it in the process of denying its existence; in the other one, he would be incoherently holding and expressing beliefs, through his *φωναί*, concerning the impossibility of having justified beliefs at all.¹¹⁰ We have seen how Sextus responds to the latter charge: the Sceptic in uttering the *φωναί* merely announces what appears to him at the moment, affirming nothing definitely (*διαβεβαιούμενος*) about external objects. We get here a similar answer to the dilemma about PAP: the Sceptic does not affirm definitely (*διαβεβαιούσθαι*) either that PAP is sound (and a proof), or that it is not sound. A question about the objective demonstrativeness or non-demonstrativeness of an argument is a question about something unclear (*ἄδηλον*), and since the Pyrrhonist never assents to anything unclear, Sextus refuses to take any position about this unclear technicality. What he does not refrain from saying is that at present the Sceptic finds PAP persuasive, although clearly to a certain degree only; otherwise, he should give assent to the PAP's conclusion, instead of suspending judgement on the existence of proof (see TI07 below). This 'feeling of persuasion' is a mental state that Sextus does not consider different from feeling pleasure or feeling pain; to experience this *πάθος* does not mean, or imply, believing that PAP is a proof (or that its conclusion is true).¹¹¹ The plausibility, and intelligibility itself, of this point could be disputed;¹¹² but, if we concede it, Sextus is at least formally right in saying that neither does a proof of the actual existence of proof count as a refutation of the Sceptic, nor does the mere fact of the Sceptic's presenting PAP doom him to self-refutation.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ In this case the reversal is only implicit, hidden under the explicit charge of 'dogmatizing' (it is possibly echoed, however, at *PH* 1.200).

¹¹¹ For the two senses, weak and strong, of *πείθεσθαι* ('to be persuaded'), parallel to those of *δογματίζειν*, cf. TI26 on p. 327.

¹¹² Cf. p. 273n69.

¹¹³ We find the most important elements of the passage above in the parallel passage at *PH* 2.187: 'Now it is possible to reply against this, for example, that since we do not believe any argument to be demonstrative we do not say that the arguments against proof are absolutely (*πάντως*) demonstrative either, but we say that they appear persuasive to us; *but persuasive <arguments> are not necessarily demonstrative*' (*ἐνεστί μὲν οὖν πρὸς ταῦτα ἀντιλέγειν, ὅσον γοῦν, ἐπεὶ μὴ*

Sextus goes on to say that any dogmatic argument in favour of the existence of proof is so far from damaging the Pyrrhonist that, on the contrary, it is even to his advantage:

TI07 For if the arguments brought *against* proof have remained uncontradicted (*ἀναντίρρητοι*), and the arguments adopted *in favour* of the existence of proof are in turn strong, adhering neither to the former nor to the latter let us agree to suspend judgement.¹¹⁴ (*M* 8.477)

The equipollence of the sceptical and dogmatic arguments for and against proof will lead us to *ἐποχή*. The claim that PAPs are 'uncontradicted'¹¹⁵ is crucial, by indicating Sextus' confidence not only that the dogmatist has not found any direct argument for their unsoundness (e.g. by pointing out false premisses or fallacious inferences), but also that the *περιτροπή* charge is to be considered a failure.

14.3.4 The PAP's exception

As we have seen, Sextus is playing a dialectical game, and dialectic is a serious affair, with well-defined rules; the Pyrrhonist still owes the dogmatist a 'yes-or-no' answer to TI04's dilemma.¹¹⁶ It is true that Sextus' previous remarks, if taken seriously, make that dilemma unsound, because incomplete:¹¹⁷ there is a third option, suspending judgement about the demonstrativeness

νομιζόμεν τινὰ λόγον εἶναι ἀποδεικτικόν, καὶ τοὺς κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγους οὐ πάντως φαμέν ἀποδεικτικούς εἶναι ἀλλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἡμῖν πιθανούς· οἱ δὲ πιθανοὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἰσὶν ἀποδεικτικοί. The last clause is a straight denial of the first horn of TI04's dilemma, that allows the Sceptic to admit that PAPs appear persuasive without having to commit himself to the dogmatic belief that they are demonstrative.

¹¹⁴ εἰ γὰρ οἱ μὲν κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως κομισθέντες λόγοι μεμενῆκασιν ἀναντίρρητοι, οἱ δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν παραληφθέντες λόγοι πάλιν εἰσὶν ἰσχυροί, μήτε ἐκείνοις μήτε τούτοις προσθέμενοι τὴν ἐποχὴν ὁμολογῶμεν. Cf. also *PH* 2.192: 'For if the arguments in favour of proof are persuasive (for let them be so) and the attacks directed against proof are also persuasive, then it is necessary to suspend judgement about proof too, saying that there no more is than is not proof' (εἰ γὰρ πιθανοὶ μὲν εἰσὶν οἱ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγοι (ἔστωσαν γάρ), πιθανοὶ δὲ καὶ αἱ πρὸς τὴν ἀπόδειξιν λεγόμεναι ἐπιχειρήσεις, ἐπέχειν ἀνάγκη καὶ περὶ τῆς ἀποδείξεως, μὴ μᾶλλον εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν ἢ μὴ εἶναι λέγοντας).

¹¹⁵ Sextus' claim that PAPs have remained *unrefuted* (*ἀναντίρρητοι*) does not mean that he considers them *unrefutable*. For the various semantic shades of the verbal adjectives ending in *-τος*, in ancient Greek and in Sextus' usage, see Barnes 1990: 17–19.

¹¹⁶ Cf. e.g. Gell. *NA* 16.2.1–2: 'They say that it is a rule of the dialectical art (*legem disciplinae dialecticae*) that if there is inquiry and discussion of any subject, and you are called upon to answer a question which is asked, you should answer the question by a simple "yes" or "no". And those who do not observe that rule, but answer *more* than they were asked, or *differently*, are thought to be both uneducated and unobservant of the customs and laws of debate.'

¹¹⁷ For arguments unsound 'because of incompleteness' (παρὰ ἑλλειψιν or κατὰ ἑλλειψιν) cf. *PH* 2.150.

of PAP, and this was Sextus' choice. But, as I have said, the dogmatist could refuse to buy into the sincerity of this choice: not only has Sextus presented an argument, but he must also believe it is a proof, otherwise he would not find it persuasive in the least (and could never hope to persuade his dogmatic adversary: remember the first horn of the dilemma in T104).

I interpret the whole final passage of *Against the Logicians* as Sextus' rejoinder to this implicit worry. Let us begin from Sextus' first move:

T108 And even if it be conceded (κἂν συγχωρηθῇ) that the argument against proof is demonstrative, the dogmatists will not gain any advantage thereby in establishing the existence of proof, as we have already pointed out; for it concludes that proof does not exist, and if this is true it becomes false that proof exists.¹¹⁸ (M 8.478)

The concessive protasis at the beginning must not be understood as a late confession that the Sceptic does in fact believe that PAP is a proof after all.¹¹⁹ Sextus is only making a *dialectical concession*, to satisfy, finally, the dogmatist's request for a 'yes-or-no' answer to his dilemma and to show that even the apparently most compromising choice ('Yes, PAP is a proof') would not force the Pyrrhonist (via περιτροπή) into the undesired admission of the existence of proof. The reason, as Sextus reminds us, is the same as he provided when the dilemma had been sent back to its proponent (cf. section 14.3.2): it is not enough to say that if one concedes that PAP is a proof, then, by περιτροπή, one must admit that proof exists; one should not overlook that, if PAP is a proof, its conclusion must be true, by definition of proof, and therefore it must be false that proof exists.¹²⁰

While by the same argument Sextus had concluded above that from admitting that PAP is a proof equipollent conflicting consequences, and

¹¹⁸ κἂν συγχωρηθῇ δὲ ἀποδεικτικός εἶναι ὁ κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγος, οὐ διὰ τοῦτο ὠφελοῦνται τι εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν οἱ δογματικοί, καθὼς ἤδη ὑπεμνήσαμεν· συνάγει γὰρ τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν, καὶ τούτου ἀληθοῦς ὄντος ψεύδους γίνεται τὸ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν.

¹¹⁹ This results even more clearly from the parallel passage of *PH* (2.187): 'But even if they are demonstrative, which we do not affirm definitely, they are absolutely also true' (εἰ δὲ ἄρα καὶ ἀποδεικτικοὶ εἰσιν (ὅπερ οὐ διαβεβαιούμεθα) πάντως καὶ ἀληθεῖς).

¹²⁰ Cf. *PH* 2.187: 'But true arguments are those which conclude a truth by means of truths; thus their conclusion is true. But it was "Therefore, proof does not exist"; therefore "Proof does not exist" is true by περιτροπή' (ἀληθεῖς δὲ εἰσι λόγοι δι' ἀληθῶν ἀληθῆς συνάγοντες· οὐκοῦν ἀληθὴς ἔστιν αὐτῶν ἡ ἐπιφορά. ἦν δὲ γε αὕτη οὐκ ἔστιν ἄρα ἀπόδειξις· ἀληθὲς ἄρα ἔστι τὸ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις ἐκ περιτροπῆς). The final ἐκ περιτροπῆς is unexpected: 'Proof does not exist' has been inferred from 'PAPs are demonstrative', and the former, although inconsistent with the latter, is not its contradictory. If we look at the dialectical context, however, this oddity can be explained: 'PAPs are demonstrative' is the second horn of the dilemma the dogmatist submitted to the Sceptic in order to force him into admitting, by περιτροπή, that proof exists. But if, as a result of seizing this horn, the conclusion is (also) that proof does not exist, the dogmatist's *intended* περιτροπή is itself subject to περιτροπή.

thus suspension of judgement, would follow, now he voices a possible dogmatic reply:

T109 Yes, they say, but the argument concluding that proof does not exist, if it is a proof, rejects itself (ἐαυτὸν ἐκβάλλει).¹²¹ (M 8.479)

At first glance this objection could seem a mere (and stubbornly redundant) restatement of the περιτροπή charge which we have already encountered and which Sextus has already tackled. However, Sextus' first answer will help us to appreciate the novelty of T109's objection. Sextus explains that PAP does not 'reject itself' in all cases (οὐ πάντως): as Zeus is said to be 'the father of gods and men' with the exception of himself, so when the Pyrrhonists conclude that proof does not exist this could be taken with the (implicit) *exception* (καθ' ὑπεξαίρεσιν) of PAP itself, which would be the only proof (M 8.479). This answer contributes to making clear that the PAP's 'rejection'¹²² the dogmatist was envisaging in T109 is not a περιτροπή of the form

if PAP is a proof, then there is at least one proof (PAP itself),
therefore proof exists (*contra* the PAP's conclusion).¹²³
 $P(\text{PAP}) \rightarrow (\exists x)P(x)$

The new charge on the table in T109 takes this different form:

if PAP is a proof, its conclusion ('Proof does not exist') is true;
but then, if proof does not exist, PAP itself is not a proof:
 $(P(\text{PAP}) \rightarrow \neg(\exists x)P(x)) \wedge (\neg(\exists x)P(x) \rightarrow \neg P(\text{PAP}))$

Sextus' first reply is that it is possible to interpret the conclusion of PAP as containing an implicit exception: from the fact that PAP is demonstrative, it follows that no proof exists apart from PAP itself. PAP does not expel itself from the set of the alleged proofs and therefore it does not banish its own demonstrative power, whose effect is to prove that no other proof exists. At the same time, Sextus retains immunity to the initial charge of περιτροπή; if the argument he presented was, implicitly

$\text{PAP}^* \leftarrow \{p, q, r, \dots\} \vdash \text{'No proof exists apart from PAP}^* \text{'}$

¹²¹ ναί, φασίν, ἀλλ' ὁ συνάγων τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν ἀποδεικτικός ὢν ἑαυτὸν ἐκβάλλει.

¹²² Although I have adopted here the neutral translation 'to reject' for ἐκβάλλειν, it is noteworthy that this Greek verb could be used in wrestling jargon to indicate a throw (cf. *Soph.* fr. 941, 113: 'which of the gods does she [sc. the Cyprian goddess] not wrestle and throw (ἐκβάλλει) three times?'; for the analogous use of καταβάλλειν cf. p. 36) and in medical jargon to indicate the *expulsion* of something from the body, e.g. a foetus or the placenta (cf. *Hipp. Mul.* 1.78) or a drug (cf. *Diosc. Ped. Mat. Med.* 3.32.1).

¹²³ Pace La Sala 2005: 136.

then the assumption that PAP* is a proof does not cause περιτροπή. The dogmatist is left with a meagre consolation: under the assumption that PAP* is a proof, the Sceptic will be committed to allowing that there exists one (and only one) proof, PAP* itself.¹²⁴

But Sextus is merciless; his further reply will aim to steal away even this consolation from his adversary.¹²⁵

14.3.5 The Pyrrhonist's final move: the περιγραφή argument

According to Sextus, as we have seen, not in all cases (οὐ πάντως) does PAP reject itself. Sextus proceeds now to explain that when taken at face value, without any exception (i.e. not as shorthand for PAP*), PAP does indeed reject itself, but

τιιο even if it does reject itself (κἄν αὐτὸν δὲ ἐκβάλλῃ), the existence of proof is not thereby confirmed. For there are many things which dispose themselves in the same condition in which they dispose other things. Just as, for example, fire after having consumed the wood destroys itself too, and purgatives after having driven the humours out of the bodies expel themselves as well, so too the argument against proof, having eliminated (ἀνελεῖν) any proof, can (δύναται) bracket also itself along with them (καὶ ἑαυτὸν συμπεριγράφειν).¹²⁶ (M 8.480)

The verbs δύναται and συμπεριγράφειν and the purgatives simile remind us of the passages about the self-bracketing of the sceptical φωναί which we examined in section 14.2 above, and invite a similar reconstruction. I believe that in the analysis of τιιο some confusion has been introduced by conflating (1) PAP itself (the set of propositions $\{p, q, r, \dots\} \vdash$ 'Proof does not exist'), (2) its conclusion ('Proof does not exist') and (3) the claim that PAP is demonstrative. Although the three are intimately

¹²⁴ Cf. M 8.296: Sextus' dialectical concession that only one sign exists would be of no advantage to the dogmatists.

This part of the argument about the possibility that PAP is presented καθ' ὑπεξαίρεσιν is absent from the parallel passage in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.

¹²⁵ Actually, what to the dogmatist could appear a meagre consolation is for Sextus still too much to concede: for the idea that it is sufficient to dogmatise on a single unclear matter to assume a 'dogmatic character' cf. PH 1.223–5.

For the use the Stoic Antipater tried to make of something similar to Sextus' 'exception-move' against the Academic sceptics cf. pp. 322–3.

¹²⁶ κἄν αὐτὸν δὲ ἐκβάλλῃ, οὐ διὰ τοῦτο κυροῦται τὸ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν. πολλὰ γάρ ἐστιν ἄτερ ὃ ἄλλα ποιεῖ, τοῦτο καὶ ἑαυτὰ διατίθῃ. οἷον ὡς τὸ πῦρ δαπανῇσαν τὴν ὕλην καὶ ἑαυτὸν συμφείρει, καὶ ὅν τρόπον τὰ καθαρτικά, ἐξελάσαντα τῶν σωμάτων τὰ ὑγρά, καὶ αὐτὰ συνεκτίθῃ, οὕτω δύναται καὶ ὁ κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγος μετὰ τὸ πᾶσαν ἀπόδειξιν ἀνελεῖν καὶ ἑαυτὸν συμπεριγράφειν.

related, PAP is not the same as its conclusion, and is not inclusive of the thought that it is a proof; the very aim of the dogmatist's initial dilemma was to force the Pyrrhonist's commitment to this.¹²⁷ The acronym 'PAP', which I have used hitherto for uniformity with McPherran, is misleading: Sextus always (and cautiously) speaks of the λόγος against proof, leaving the demonstrativeness or otherwise of the argument unprejudged. A more appropriate label, which I shall adopt hereafter, is thus 'AAP' (Argument Against Proof), where 'argument' is to be understood in the broadest and least technical sense possible.

The Pyrrhonist concludes that (2) 'Proof does not exist' on the basis of (1) AAP; but if (3) the Pyrrhonist takes AAP to be a proof (as Sextus is conceding in τιιο only for the sake of argument), then he will also have to admit that the conclusion (2) that no proof exists is a conclusion about AAP too, and thus that AAP is not a proof.¹²⁸ The self-bracketing of AAP that Sextus accepts and embraces has as its result the expunction of AAP from the set of the alleged proofs in which it had been assumed *ex hypothesi*; it is neither a form of pragmatic self-refutation (*contra* McPherran and Burnyeat), nor the form of *ad hominem* περιτροπή with which the dogmatist had initially charged the Pyrrhonist in τιο3 and τιο4. Not only does AAP not incur reversal, but it is not even self-bracketing *tout court*. Only when coupled with the distinct assumption that it is a proof does AAP inscribe itself within its scope, 'rejecting' itself in the plain sense that it concludes of itself too that it is not a proof. It is in this sense that AAP *can* bracket itself: AAP brackets itself if taken to be a proof. Just as in the case of the sceptical φωναί, then, I suggest that δύναται in τιιο is indicative of possibility (under certain conditions), and not of invariably realised capacity.¹²⁹

Note the parallelism with Sextus' use of self-bracketing with regard to the φωναί: there the περιγραφή argument showed how it is impossible for the Pyrrhonist to slip into dogmatism when uttering his expressions;

¹²⁷ This is not to recant the more general point made on p. 174 that the act of advancing a certain view in debate is often treated as inclusive of the reasons offered in support of that view, and criticised on this basis.

¹²⁸ Cf. the parallel passage in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (2.188): 'Just as purgative drugs evacuate themselves along with the matter present in the body, so the arguments can (δύνανται) bracket themselves along with (ἑαυτοὺς συμπεριγράφειν) the other arguments which are said to be demonstrative' (δύνανται δὲ οἱ λόγοι, καθάπερ καὶ τὰ καθαρτικά φάρμακα ταῖς ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑποκειμέναις ὕλαις ἑαυτὰ συνεξάγει, οὕτω καὶ αὐτοὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις λόγοις τοῖς ἀποδεικτικοῖς εἶναι λεγομένοις καὶ ἑαυτοὺς συμπεριγράφειν).

¹²⁹ My interpretation of δύναται (cf. pp. 271 and 274) is corroborated by the fact that Sextus does not use this verb in his similes: he does not write that fire *can* destroy itself too and purgatives *can* expel themselves too (cf. also PH 2.188 in n. 128 above).

here, the περιγραφή argument shows that it is impossible for the Pyrrhonist to incur περιτροπή and involuntarily admit the existence of proof when propounding his AAP. For if someone asserts that AAP is a proof (the necessary condition for incurring περιτροπή), he thereby commits himself to the non-existence of proofs, the alleged PAP not excepted.

As the Pyrrhonist intends them, both the sceptical arguments against proof and the sceptical expressions can be compared to expunging brackets; they signify, respectively, the expunction of all the alleged proofs and all the alleged truths about unclear matters from the Pyrrhonist's mind. Their status is intrinsically different from the status of what they expunge: AAPs are not advanced by the Pyrrhonist as proofs, and the φωναί are not meant to express truths about unclear matters of fact. Analogously, the nature of diacritical marks, like expunging brackets, differs from that of the other signs that can appear on the page of a papyrus or a codex; the περιγραφαί are in the text, but not part of the text.

Suppose that a dogmatist is – or pretends to be – unable to grasp the way in which the Pyrrhonist intends his AAPs and φωναί; he insists on claiming that AAPs are meant to be genuine proofs and that the φωναί are meant to express true maxims, and thus he charges the Pyrrhonist with περιτροπή and dogmatism. Sextus will explain to him that, even so, AAPs and φωναί, by becoming part of their own scope, would immediately bracket, respectively, their own demonstrativeness and truth, leaving no dogmatic residue.

Imagine a circumstance in which someone (say, a dull copyist) is unable to understand the difference between ordinary linguistic signs (e.g. letters of the Greek alphabet) and diacritical signs (e.g. pairs of expunging brackets). He is instructed that whenever in the exemplar he finds something included within round brackets, he is not to reproduce it on his codex. The copyist follows the instructions, but continues to consider the brackets themselves as a part of the text: he does not copy what is included within brackets, but he zealously reproduces the outer text *and* the brackets themselves. The copyist's supervisor tries hard to elucidate the status of the expunging brackets, but his attempt is unsuccessful. The supervisor, however, does not lose his proverbial tranquillity, and devises an ingenious trick to obtain the desired result from his dull employee (a manuscript in which the original text is copied, without the expunged passages or, needless to say, the expunging brackets). He explains to him that the pairs of round brackets mean not only 'Don't copy what we bracket: it's spurious!', but also for 'Don't copy us either! We are spurious too!' He explains that the περιγραφαί are 'self-bracketing brackets'.

Obviously this would be an incorrect account of what expunging brackets are and of how they operate: expunging brackets do not need to expunge themselves too, simply because they are not the kind of things that need to (or can) be expunged from a text. Similarly, the φωναί and AAPs, *as the Pyrrhonist understands them*, do not require expunction, simply because they are not meant to be true dogmatic maxims and demonstrations. Nevertheless, if the dogmatist wishes to behave like the dull copyist, the Pyrrhonist has some effective comeback.

14.3.6 The ladder simile

Sextus' similes of purgatives and fire in ΤΙΙΟ are also intended to illustrate the functioning of the περιγραφή argument, by depicting an expunction *without residues*, and are not, again, similes for the reversal process of περιτροπή. There is a further thought-provoking Sextan simile for the kind of self-elimination that a proof of the non-existence of proof would undergo:

ΤΙΙΙ And again, just as it is not impossible for one who has ascended to a high place by a ladder to overturn (ἀνατρέψαι) the ladder with his foot after the ascent, so also it is not unlikely that the Sceptic, having arrived at establishing what was proposed by means of the argument showing the non-existence of proof, as if it were by a scaling ladder, should then also eliminate (ἀνελεῖν) this very argument.¹³⁰ (M 8.481)

This simile contains a temporal ingredient which we have also found in ΤΙΙΟ: *first* the alleged PAP eliminates the other proofs, and *then* brackets itself; *first* the fire consumes the wood, and *then* destroys itself; *first* purgatives expel the humours, and *then* themselves; *first* the man ascends to a high place, and *then* kicks away the ladder he has just used.¹³¹

¹³⁰ καὶ πάλιν ὡς οὐκ ἀδύνατόν ἐστι τὸν διὰ τινος κλίμακος ἐφ' ὕψηλόν ἀναβάντα τόπον μετὰ τὴν ἀνάβασιν ἀνατρέψαι τῷ ποδὶ τὴν κλίμακα, οὕτως οὐκ ἀπέοικε τὸν σκεπτικόν, ὡς διὰ τινος ἐπιβάθρας τοῦ δεικνύντος λόγου τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀπόδειξιν χρήσαντα ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ προκειμένου κατασκευήν, τότε καὶ αὐτὸν τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἀνελεῖν.

This simile also appears, famously, at proposition 6.54 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (cf. the *incipit* of part III on p. 249).

¹³¹ At PH 2.188 instead of the simile of the ladder we find an analogy with 'Nothing is true', that also appeared at PH 1.14 as equivalent to 'Everything is false': 'This is not incongruous, since also the expression "Nothing is true" not only eliminates each of the other things but also reverses itself along with them' (τοῦτο γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπεμφαίνον, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὕτη ἡ οὐδὲν ἔστιν ἀληθές οὐ μόνον τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστον ἀναρεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑαυτὴν ἐκείνοις συμπεριτρέπει).

Just as in the case of PH 1.14–15, the analogy can be misleading and induce a false identification of the self-bracketing of AAP with the περιτροπή of 'Nothing is true'. None the less, the analogy allows us to repeat a non-trivial point: the περιτροπή of sentences such as 'Everything is false'

McPherran lays great emphasis on this ingredient: the 'temporal gap' between the impression of finding the $\phi\omega\nu\alpha\iota$ and $\rho\alpha\pi$ s persuasive and the subsequent realisation of their self-refutation (absolute in the former case, pragmatic in the latter) leaves sufficient room for them to perform their function (inducing $\epsilon\pi\omicron\chi\eta$) without violating the 'psychological' principle of non-contradiction, the only principle to which the Pyrrhonist is somehow committed.¹³² Although undeniably the temporal gap is emphasised in the closing section of *Against the Logicians*, in none of the three parallel passages we have analysed does it appear: 'Οὐδὲν μᾶλλον brackets itself along with the other things' (*PH* 1.14); 'We say that they [*sc.* the $\phi\omega\nu\alpha\iota$] can eliminate themselves, being bracketed along with what they are said of' (*PH* 1.206); 'Just as purgative drugs evacuate themselves along with the matter present in the body, so the arguments can bracket themselves along with the other arguments which are said to be demonstrative' (*PH* 2.188). In section 2 of chapter 15 we will see that the purgatives simile is also reported by Diogenes Laertius (1134 on p. 335) and Aristocles (1135 on p. 337): a temporal gap between the purge of the humours and the self-expulsion of the purgatives occurs in Diogenes' account, but not in Aristocles'.

If I have been right to maintain that the four Sextan passages embody a homogeneous philosophical strategy, the most plausible conclusion is that a temporal gap between the expunction of the other alleged proofs and the realisation of the self-bracketing character of $\rho\alpha\pi$ itself can exist at a psychological level,¹³³ but should not play any major role in the logic of the argument.¹³⁴ What Sextus absolutely does need is that AAPs should

and 'Nothing is true' is a kind of self-elimination, the $\pi\epsilon\pi\iota\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\eta$ of the sceptical $\phi\omega\nu\alpha\iota$ and AAPs is a different kind of self-elimination (cf. p. 275). Sextus' analogy is justified; it is our task not to mistake the analogy for an identity.

¹³² Cf. McPherran 1987: 316. For the same stress on the temporal aspect cf. Corti 2002: 44–6. For an interesting, but in my opinion ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to support an analogous interpretation by attributing to Sextus himself the use of non-monotonic logic cf. Morton 2003.

¹³³ Surely in dialectical contexts like those we have examined the concession 'AAP is not a proof' follows one step after the conclusion 'No proof exists' (which follows itself 'AAP is a proof').

¹³⁴ In an important sense, the similes of fire and of purgatives, unlike that of a ladder, do not fit McPherran's temporal idea: although they describe processes extended in time, it is inexact to say that fire destroys itself only after having burnt the wood, or that purgatives expel themselves only after having driven out the harmful humours. Fire burns out more and more *as* the wood is burnt, and dies out in the very instant in which the last residue of wood is consumed; purgatives are expelled *progressively* with the expulsion of the humours; when the last residues of the humours are expelled, the last residues of purgatives are expelled too (cf. Nussbaum 1991: 551). Also in the simile of the 'self-bracketing brackets' which I have tried to develop the temporal aspect does not seem to play any role. The fact that *M* 8, unlike *PH*, unduly introduces a temporal aspect into the self-rejection of AAPs might be indirect confirmation of Bett's (and other scholars') suspicion that *PH* is better, and perhaps later, than *M* 7–11 (cf. e.g. Bett 2005: xxiv–xxx). For the partial inadequacy of the ladder simile itself cf. p. 307n163.

not be bracketed *before* they can do the work they are meant to do, as if bizarre purgatives somehow vanishing before being swallowed;¹³⁵ in section 14.3.7 below I shall consider whether AAPs can meet even this minimal requirement.

Before then, however, let us take a look at some external evidence which has been used to support the temporal reading. Following Burnyeat (1976a: 63), McPherran associates the three ancient similes of Penelope's web (in Cicero), the octopus (in Plutarch and Stobaeus) and the hydra (in Numenius) with Sextus' purgatives simile, and takes all of them as similes for sceptical self-refutation (1987: 291n5). After presenting his interpretation of the key role that the temporal gap plays in Sextus' argument, McPherran adds:

The metaphors of the polypus and Penelope . . . support this interpretation as well: the polypus eats its own tentacles only *after* they have grown, and Penelope *first* weaves her web and *then* unweaves it. (1987: 297n20)

I believe a quick survey of the relevant passages will show that they fail to support McPherran's interpretation.

Penelope's web

1112 What of the fact that the same art [*sc.* dialectic], like Penelope unweaving her web, in the end destroys what has come before (*tollit ad extremum superiora*)? Is that your fault or ours? It is presumably the foundation of dialectic that whatever is asserted (what they call $\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\omega\mu\alpha$, that is like 'proposition' (*effatum*)) is either true or false. Well, are the following <propositions> true or false? 'If you say that you are speaking falsely, and you are telling the truth, you are speaking falsely' and 'if you are speaking falsely, you are telling the truth'. Of course, you call these 'insoluble' (*inexplicabilia*) . . . if these propositions [*sc.* the Liar] cannot be solved, and no criterion is found for them, to enable you to answer whether they are true or false, what has become of that definition of the proposition as that which is either true or false?¹³⁶ (Cic. *Luc.* 95)

¹³⁵ Cf. also Clement's criticism in *Strom.* 8.5.15 (1136 on p. 341).

¹³⁶ Quid quod eadem illa ars quasi Penelopae telam retexens tollit ad extremum superiora? Utrum ea vestra an nostra culpa est? Nempe fundamentum dialecticae est, quidquid enuntietur id autem appellant $\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\omega\mu\alpha$, quod est quasi effatum, aut verum esse aut falsum. Quid igitur? Haec vera an falsa sunt: si te mentiri dicis idque verum dicis, mentiris <et, si mentiris,> verum dicis? Haec scilicet inexplicabilia esse dicitis . . . si ista explicari non possunt nec eorum ullum iudicium invenitur, ut respondere possitis verane an falsa sint, ubi est illa definitio, effatum esse id quod aut verum aut falsum sit?

For the text I adopt, with the addition of <et si mentiris> in the MSS lacuna cf. Cavini 1993a: 91; for discussion of various alternative emendations cf. Mignucci 1999a: 163–7, 1999b: 56–62.

Here it is a Sceptic (Cicero, speaking on behalf of the Clitomachean Academy, probably on the basis of Carneadean material)¹³⁷, that argues, against the Stoics, that *Stoic* dialectic *tollit ad extremum superiora*, like Penelope unweaving her web: no Sceptic is being charged with self-refutation, and so much the less is accepting self-refutation. What Cicero says is that a part of Chrysippean dialectic (its diagnosis that the Liar is 'insoluble') destroys, i.e. is inconsistent with, another part of it, in fact one of its foundations: the principle of bivalence. But, whatever the actual merits of this charge, to say that Chrysippean dialectic makes mutually *inconsistent* claims is different from saying that it makes self-refuting claims.¹³⁸ The simile of Penelope's web is not meant to depict a self-refuting thesis, but an inconsistent system of theses: Chrysippus' dialectic.

The existence of the temporal element ('Penelope *first* weaves her web and *then* unweaves it') is unquestionable, but does not support McPherran's point. The gradual weaving and successive unweaving of the web cannot be interpreted as the metaphorical counterpart of a "temporal gap" between the "immediate" application of a propositionally-construed utterance to the world and its further logical applications – especially to itself' (1987: 297). They represent, instead, the progressive enlargement of the range of Stoic dialectic and its final running into difficulties. Cicero had previously described this logical movement: dialectic 'starts out by cheerfully imparting the elements of discourse, an understanding of ambiguities, and the principle of deduction (*concludendi rationem*)' (*Luc.* 92). We know that among the first elements of dialectic which Cicero is hinting at there is certainly the Principle of Bivalence, or better the Stoic account of the ὀξίωμος as 'that which is either true or false'. 'But then, by a series of small additions, it [*sc.* dialectic] gets to Sorites arguments, a slippery and hazardous area' and to the Liar: the web of Chrysippean dialectic reaches its maximal extension when it comes to deal with the thorniest logical paradoxes.¹³⁹ At

¹³⁷ Cf. Long and Sedley 1987: vol. II, 226. ¹³⁸ For this distinction cf. the introduction.

¹³⁹ Hankinson (2007: 365) nicely stresses that the phrase itself 'by a series of small additions' (*paucis additis*) seems to hint at some sort of soritical progression. I interpret this, however, as the generic progression from the safe ground of the principles of Stoic dialectic to the advanced and controversial area of the paradoxes, and not as Hankinson's specific 'meta-Sorites', which starting from the Stoic's acceptance of the validity of the first indemonstrable concludes the validity of very long chains of first indemonstrables, such as the Sorites itself ('simple *modus ponens* leads, inexorably, to the sorites; logic destroys itself' (367)). Hankinson's interpretation rests on a quite strained reading of *ratio concludendi* as Cicero's Latin counterpart of συναπτικός λόγος ('conclusive argument'), and as a direct reference to the Stoic first indemonstrable in particular. Moreover, on that interpretation Cicero would be locating the core of the Sorites difficulty in its logical syntax, rather than the semantic issue of identifying which of the various (apparently epistemically indistinguishable) conditional premisses is materially false, and this seems to me difficult to square with the rest of Cicero's passage (*Luc.* 93–4) and with the ancient evidence on the Sorites.

this point the difficulties begin: Chrysippus' policy for the Sorites, based on 'coming to rest' a little before reaching problematic conclusions, is judged unsatisfactory, and his solution of the Liar is inconsistent (according to Carneades) with one of the foundations of his dialectic, the Principle of Bivalence. If Chrysippus wants to claim that the Liar is *inexplicable*,¹⁴⁰ then he ought to unweave a part of his logical web, and actually one of the parts that had been woven first: his dialectic *tollit ad extremum superiora*, ends up destroying its principles¹⁴¹ (incidentally, it is not clear what Chrysippean solution of the Liar Cicero has in mind here). An analogous point is made at *Luc.* 95–6, where Chrysippus' claim that the Liar is insoluble is charged not with self-refutation, but with inconsistency with another cornerstone of Stoic dialectic, the validity of the first indemonstrable. To clarify the difference between the kind of incoherence with which Chrysippus' dialectic is charged by Cicero and the kind of self-refutation which McPherran wants Sextus to accept consider the following point: 'but this is their extreme resource: they demand an *exception* for these insoluble things' (*Luc.* 97).¹⁴² In section 14.3.4 above we have seen Sextus consider the move of claiming that PAP involves an exception (*M.* 8.479); but in Sextus the exception is that PAP should not apply *to itself* (it should conclude that no proof exists apart from itself), whereas here the Stoic proposal is that the first indemonstrable should not be applied *to the Liar* (that is, it should be considered a valid mode of inference in all cases but those in which its premisses are liable to generate Liar-paradoxical consequences).¹⁴³

The octopus

ΤΙΙ3 It seems to me that this man [*sc.* Chrysippus] with great effort and ingenuity overturns and downthrows common sense (ἀνατρέπειν καὶ καταβάλλειν τὴν συνήθειαν), as his own supporters themselves to some extent testify when they disagree with him about the Liar. For, my dear, to deny that a conjunction formed of contradictories is without doubt false, and again, to say that some arguments with true premisses and sound inferences still have the

¹⁴⁰ *Inexplicable* is Cicero's Latin rendering for ἄπορον λόγον. For Chrysippus' strong interest in the Liar cf. pp. 14–15. Long and Sedley (1987: vol. I, 229) conjecture that Chrysippus 'took "I am lying" to change its truth-value from false to true during the course of utterance'; Cavini 1993a suggests that Chrysippus considered the Liar assertion ('I'm speaking falsely') as ungrounded, i.e. with an arbitrary truth-value, but still consistent; Mignucci 1999b proposes that Chrysippus considered 'I'm saying something false' as a truth-value lacking proposition, and therefore as an exception to the generality of the Principle of Bivalence (as Cicero denounces), but still meaningful.

¹⁴¹ Hankinson (2007: 367–8) misdescribes this as an unequivocal 'charge of self-refutation', accepting McPherran's analogy with the Sextan passages.

¹⁴² Sed hoc extremum eorum est: postulant ut excipiantur haec inexplicabilia.

¹⁴³ Cicero's (obscure) example is 'If you are speaking falsely, you are speaking falsely'. For an analysis of Cicero's passage cf. Barnes 1997a.

contradictories of their conclusions true as well – what conception of demonstration or what preconception of confirmation does that not overturn (ποῖαν ἔννοιαν ἀποδείξεως ἢ τίνα πίστεως οὐκ ἀνατρέπει πρόληψιν)? They say that the octopus gnaws off its own tentacles in winter. As Chrysippus' dialectic destroys and amputates its own main parts and principles (τὰ κυριώτατα μέρη καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς αὐτῆς ἀναιροῦσα καὶ περικόπτουσα), what other conceptions has it left free from doubt?¹⁴⁴ (Plut. *Comm. Not.* 1059D6–E9)

It is difficult, again, to determine which Chrysippean solution to the Liar Diadumenus is hinting at in this passage from Plutarch's *On Common Conceptions*, but fortunately that is not necessary for our present purposes. What is certain is that Diadumenus and some 'dissident' Stoics believe (it does not matter here whether correctly or not) that such a solution implies (1) denying that a conjunction of contradictories is unrestrictedly false and (2) admitting that some valid arguments with true premisses have the contradictory of their conclusions true as well. Both (1) and (2) are inconsistent with our common logical conceptions and – more importantly – with the foundations of Chrysippean dialectic: (1) imposes some restriction on the Principle of Non-Contradiction and (2) is at odds with any ideas, either common or philosophical, of valid argument and demonstration.¹⁴⁵ The similarity with the Carneadean argument in the *Lucullus* is remarkable. Chrysippean dialectic subverts both common sense and its own foundations once it has rashly engaged 'the most hazardous topics'. The octopus is an odd creature, because it gnaws off its own tentacles during winter, but Chrysippean dialectic is something even *odder*: when it comes to deal with some particularly puzzling issues, such as the Liar, it ends up destroying not some appendage, but its most vital parts

¹⁴⁴ ἔμοι δοκεῖ μετὰ πλείστης ἐπιμελείας καὶ δεινότητος οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ ἀνατρέπει καὶ καταβάλλει τὴν συνήθειαν, ὡς ἑνιαχοῦ καὶ αὐτοὶ μαρτυροῦσιν οἱ τὸν ἀνδρὰ σεμνύνοντες, ὅταν αὐτῷ περὶ τοῦ ψευδομένου μάχωνται. τὸ γὰρ, ὡς ἄριστε, συμπεπλεγμένον τι δι' ἀντικειμένων μὴ φάναι ψεύδος εὐπῶρος εἶναι, λόγους δὲ πάλιν αὐτῷ φάναι τινὰς ἀληθεῖς τὰ λήματα καὶ τὰς ἀγωγὰς ὑγιεῖς ἔχοντας εἶτα καὶ τὰ ἀντικείμενα τῶν συμπερασμάτων ἔχειν ἀληθεῖς, ποῖαν ἔννοιαν ἀποδείξεως ἢ τίνα πίστεως οὐκ ἀνατρέπει πρόληψιν; τὸν μὲν γε πολὺποδὶ φασι τὰς πλεκτάνας αὐτοῦ περιβιβρώσκειν ὥρᾳ χειμῶνος, ἡ δὲ Χρυσίππου διαλεκτικὴ τὰ κυριώτατα μέρη καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς αὐτῆς ἀναιροῦσα καὶ περικόπτουσα τίνα τῶν ἄλλων ἐννοιῶν ἀπολέλοιπεν ἀνύποπτον; Wyttenbach, followed by Cherniss and Hülser, emended the MSS reading ὡς ἄριστε into ἀορίστως, Long and Sedley (1987: vol. II, 227) into ἀορίστων ('indefinite contradictories'); I keep the MSS reading with Cavini 1993a: 103 and Mignucci 1999b: 62.

¹⁴⁵ In virtue of the Stoic 'principle of conditionalisation' (cf. p. 110), an argument is valid when the conditional having the conclusion of the argument as its consequent and the conjunction of the premisses as its antecedent is true. On the (most likely Chrysippean) συνάρτησις truth-conditions for conditional propositions (cf. T25 on p. 108), then, the contradictory of the conclusion of a valid argument will have to be in conflict with the conjunction of the premisses, which implies that it cannot be true when the premisses (and the conclusion) are true. For a Stoic definition of ἀπόδειξις cf. p. 278n84.

(τὰ κυριώτατα μέρη), its principles (τὰς ἀρχὰς). In the case of the Stoic 'dialectical octopus' we might say that it is not the octopus that eats its own tentacles, but the tentacles that cut to pieces and kill the octopus' body. Like Cicero, therefore, Plutarch (c. 46–120 AD) portrays a situation in which a Sceptic is the accuser and a Stoic is in the dock; the charge is that a part of Chrysippean dialectic (its most advanced inquiries) overturns and eliminates *other* (more fundamental and commonsensical) ones, but not that some part of Chrysippean dialectic is itself self-refuting.

The same comparison between dialectic and an octopus has been preserved by Stobaeus (fifth century AD), in a section of his *Florilegium* (*Anthology*) collecting the judgements of several philosophers concerning dialectic:

ΠΙ4 Carneades used to say that dialectic is similar to an octopus; for the latter eats its tentacles after they have grown, the former overturns (ἀνατρέπειν) also its own bases (τὰ σφέτερα) as its power rises (προϊούσης τῆς δυνάμεως).¹⁴⁶ (*Flor.* 2.2.20)

Plutarch's and Stobaeus' excerpts shed light on each other: Stobaeus attributes the octopus comparison to Carneades (who, likely, had devised the simile of Penelope's web too), while Plutarch's testimony allows us to understand that 'dialectic' in Stobaeus' concise report should be read as 'Chrysippean dialectic', and not as dialectic *tout court*. In Stobaeus, unlike Plutarch, we find a temporal element also present in Cicero's ΠΙ2: dialectic refutes itself as its power rises, like an octopus that eats its own tentacles *after* they have grown. I interpret προϊούσης τῆς δυνάμεως as referring to that stage in which dialectic comes to deal with the most advanced issues, like the Sorites and the Liar, that time in which, in Cicero's terms, the dialectical web reaches its maximal extension. It is at this point that Chrysippean dialectic τὰ σφέτερα ἀνατρέπει. It is not easy to find a fully satisfactory translation for τὰ σφέτερα; Burnyeat's 'its own results' (1976a: 63) might suggest that it is the newest and most puzzling parts of dialectic (the tentacles just grown) that are destroyed, and that would make the similarity between the octopus and dialectic perfect. But we have seen in ΠΙ3 that according to Diadumenus the correspondence is not complete:

¹⁴⁶ Καρνεάδης τὴν διαλεκτικὴν ἔλεγε πολὺποδι ὁικεῖναι· καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνον αὐξηθεῖσας τὰς πλεκτάνας κατεσθῆναι, καὶ ταύτην προϊούσης τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ τὰ σφέτερα ἀνατρέπειν. Most MSS have τούτους, which would require τοὺς διαλεκτικούς instead of τὴν διαλεκτικὴν. I adopt ταύτην, which occurs in MS A² (*Parisinus alter Florilegii*), to have full similarity between Plutarch's and Stobaeus' testimonies (but, as Simonetta Nannini made me notice, it is not impossible to keep the MSS text with τὴν διαλεκτικὴν and τούτους, if we think of a transition typical of oral language – but not too infrequent in writing – from an abstract singular ('dialectic') to a concrete plural ('the dialecticians'), which might have been favoured here by the occurrence of the concrete simile of the octopus).

Chrysippean dialectic is a weird species of octopus that destroys not its tentacles, but its own vital body, so 'its own bases' or 'its own secured property' could be more appropriate translations.

The hydra

ΤΙΙ5 He [*sc.* Arcesilaus] did not have it in him ever to say one and the same thing, nor indeed did he ever think such a thing at all worthy of a clever man... After saying whatever came into his mind, he would change again and overturn it in more ways than he had used to establish it (ἀνέτρεπεν ἂν πλεοναχῶς ἢ δι' ὅσων κατεσκευάκει). So he would cut himself and be cut by himself in pieces like a hydra, not distinguishing which was which, and without regard to decency.¹⁴⁷ (Numen. *ap.* Eus. *PE* 14.6.1–3)

Unlike the previous two cases, at least one half of McPherran's 'sceptical self-refutation' is present here: the protagonist of the passage and target of Numenius' criticism is a Sceptic (of the Academic brand), Arcesilaus, and not a Stoic with his inconsistent dialectic. But, once again, the charge is not self-refutation, not at least in the quite technical sense McPherran attributes to 'self-refutation' and Sextus to περιτρέπτειν / περιτροπή. Numenius (third century AD) portrays Arcesilaus as a terrific sophist, capable of speaking equally persuasively on both sides of any question. The image of the many-headed hydra cutting itself is meant to represent such amazing capacity for unceasingly finding arguments (more or less deceitful) *pro* and *contra*.¹⁴⁸ For any thesis *p*, not only could Arcesilaus devise some argument in favour of *p*, but he could subsequently present more counter-arguments against *p*, and then again produce even more counter-counters in favour of *p*, and so on. Any refutation, thus, was overturned by more refutations, just as whenever a head of the mythical hydra was cut off, two new ones grew in its place. Notice that here, like in ΤΙΙ3, the philosopher is pictured as even more monstrous and odd than the most monstrous and odd creatures. The hydra was able to regenerate itself after its heads were severed by Heracles; Arcesilaus did not even wait to be refuted by some opponent before replying with renewed force and wealth of arguments;

¹⁴⁷ τὸ γὰρ ἓνα τε λόγον καὶ ταῦτόν ποτ' εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἔνῃν ἐν αὐτῷ οὐδὲ γε ἤξιον ἀνδρὸς εἶναι πῶς τὸ τοιοῦτο δεξιῶς οὐδαμῶς... ὁπότερον εἰς τὰς ψυχὰς πέσοι τοῦτο εἰπὼν αὐθις μεταβαλὼν ἀνέτρεπεν ἂν πλεοναχῶς ἢ δι' ὅσων κατεσκευάκει. ἦν οὖν ὕδραν τέμνων ἑαυτὸν καὶ τεμνόμενος ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἀμφοτέρω ἀλλήλων δυσκρίτως καὶ τοῦ δέοντος ἀσκέπτως.

¹⁴⁸ For the likely ultimate source of ΤΙΙ5 cf. Plato's comparison between the sophist Euthydemus and the hydra, 'a sophistic monster... irresistible because of its cleverness', whose 'heads of argument' regrew in larger number whenever they were cut off (*Euthd.* 297b–c).

he himself willingly acted as his own Heracles.¹⁴⁹ The hydra simile has a charming figurative force, but the particular form of 'antilogy' (ἀντιλογία) it depicts has nothing to do with the kind of self-refutation in which we are interested: to refute unceasingly one's own arguments through new arguments is something very different from refuting oneself by asserting a self-refuting maxim or presenting a self-refuting argument.

14.3.7 The therapeutic function of the περιγραφή argument

I have emphasised above several features that make Sextus' treatment of the sceptical language and arguments parallel, starting from the defensive dialectical role the περιγραφή argument plays in both cases.¹⁵⁰ But that parallelism is not perfect. The crucial difference rests on the apparently trivial fact that sceptical AAPS, unlike the sceptical expressions, are *arguments*. Sextus can explain that his φωναί must be intended as mere reports or avowals of his present state of mind, and thus avoid the charge of dogmatising: a Sceptic who utters οὐδὲν μᾶλλον on finding himself in a state of suspension of judgement would be no different from someone who reports his state of pain to his doctor, or cries 'ouch', when feeling pain. In the case of AAPS, however, such an account would be insufficient. Sextus cannot be satisfied with clarifying that, when presenting them, the Pyrrhonist is not refuting himself by reversal; AAPS are arguments, and one function of arguments is to persuade oneself and others of the truth of their conclusion.¹⁵¹ In principle Sextus has every right to put AAPS on the table and claim that he finds them persuasive (to the same degree as the opposite arguments), but at the same time to refuse to decide whether they are genuine proofs or not. Nevertheless, he cannot confine himself to this kind of first-person announcement.

¹⁴⁹ For Aristo of Chius' famous parodic description of Arcesilaus as a philosophical chimaera cf. S.E. *PH* 1.234; D.L. 4.33; Numen. *ap.* Eus. *PE* 14.5.13.

¹⁵⁰ The dialectical and concessive character of the περιγραφή argument is apparent in the case of AAP: the Sceptic does not claim that AAP is a proof; *even if* he concedes that it is one, AAP does not necessarily reject itself (it might be exempted from self-reference); *even if* AAP rejects itself, the existence of proof is not thereby confirmed. For this Gorgias-style line of argument cf. p. 238n119; for the large use Sextus makes of it cf. Long 1984.

¹⁵¹ *Contra* McPherran (1987: 298), who speaks of the φωναί as if their function were to persuade oneself or others. This is not to deny that in certain cases a sceptical expression might be used as a kind of reminder of the conclusion of certain general arguments or sets of arguments leading to suspension of judgement, thus becoming, indirectly, a way to induce suspension of judgement (e.g. 'Proof exists no more than it does not exist' might be intended as a 'commemorative sign' of all those arguments for and against the existence of proof that the Pyrrhonist has marshalled (cf. p. 172)).

In the case of AAPs, Sextus must guarantee that they keep the capacity to persuade us that proof does not exist, to the same degree to which the arguments in favour of proof persuade us of the opposite, since only in this case will we suspend judgement. We have seen that Sextus is confident of having guaranteed his λόγοι this persuasive power, and not only safety from περιτροπή; is this confidence justified?

The dogmatist, on the one hand, starts from the assumption stated in the first horn of ΠΙΟ4's dilemma: (a) unless AAPs are recognised to be demonstrative, they are not credible. The Pyrrhonist, on the other hand, thinks that such a requirement is excessive, and claims that (b) persuasive arguments need not be demonstrative.¹⁵²

Let us consider again the structure of the περιγραφή argument, as I sketched it above:

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| (1) $\langle \{p, q, r, \dots\} \rangle$ — 'Proof does not exist' > | AAP |
| (2) AAP is a proof | dialectical concession |
| (3) The conclusion of AAP is true | from (2), for the |
| | definition of proof |
| (4) Proof does not exist | from (1) and (3) |
| (5) AAP is not a proof | from (4) |

As a defensive dialectical manoeuvre against the charge of περιτροπή, the argument seems to be successful.¹⁵³ From (1) AAP and the assumption that (2) AAP is a proof, it follows that no proof exists, AAP not excepted; even if the Sceptic were committed to the compromising belief that (2) (actually he is not), he would not thereby be committed, by περιτροπή, to the existence of proof, no more at least than to its non-existence.

Sextus' argument might also appear effective 'offensively', as an anti-dogmatic device: it concludes that (4) proof does not exist in a credible way, namely through an argument, AAP, which on assumption (2) is demonstrative (the dogmatist's requirement (a) is therefore satisfied). But why on earth should a dogmatist grant (2), if not, strategically, to force the Sceptic into περιτροπή? Let me suggest an answer on the Sceptic's behalf. The dogmatist has yet to produce any *direct* argument establishing that AAP is not demonstrative (by unmasking, for example, false premisses or fallacious inferences). The burden of proof is on him; given what counts as a proof from his perspective, the sceptical AAPs have all the appearance of genuine

¹⁵² See *PH* 2.187 (p. 286n113).

¹⁵³ In the same way I consider successful the περιγραφή argument in reply to the charge of δογματίζειν.

proofs and thus, until he can demonstrate the contrary, the dogmatist should admit that this is what they are. In virtue of *his own* high standards of assent and argument, the dogmatist cannot confine himself to saying, without giving reasons, that AAPs, unlike many other proof-resembling arguments, are not really demonstrative, solely on the basis that he does not like their conclusion.¹⁵⁴ If he wished to do so, he ought to admit that his arguments cannot be considered proofs either; otherwise, he ought to grant, honestly, that AAPs too must be proofs, and accept (2) and its consequences.¹⁵⁵

Any alert reader should feel dissatisfied with this whole train of reasoning. There is actually a straightforward argument that proves the non-demonstrativeness of AAP: the assumption (2) 'AAP is a proof' has, as its last consequence, (5) 'AAP is not a proof'. Since (5) is the contradictory of (2), (2) must be false, by *Consequentia Mirabilis*. As a matter of pure deductive logic, the Sceptic's AAP *cannot* be a genuine proof, as I have remarked more than once in our previous discussion. No genuine proof of the non-existence of proof can exist. Sextus must seize the first horn of the dilemma, and admit that AAP is not a proof. He can still insist, perhaps, that AAP, although definitely non-demonstrative, appears persuasive to him, just as much as the arguments in favour of proof, but he can no longer hope to lead the dogmatist to ἐποχή; for the dogmatist will never be persuaded by AAP which he can prove to be non-demonstrative (see (a) above). If the Sceptic, mysteriously (and irrationally), keeps finding AAP persuasive and persists in a mental state of suspension of judgement about the existence of proof, perhaps it would be impolite to accuse him of either self-refutation or insincerity, but certainly the Sceptic has no cure left for the dogmatic disease. The maximum we can concede to Sextus is that all his talk about AAPs was pointless: he and the dogmatist have achieved only a draw, each of them sticking to his starting position (but 'neutral' observers would probably object that the Sceptic has achieved this alleged draw by giving up fighting and refusing to abide by the rules of proper dialectical exchange, which, therefore, he has actually lost).

In defence of the Sceptic one might argue that, as I have maintained in part I, chapter 6, a proof by CM could have been unavailable in the ancient dogmatists' logical arsenal. We do not find in Sextus (or other ancient

¹⁵⁴ The Pyrrhonist, on the contrary, not being committed to these standards, can reject an argument that appears unsound (e.g. a sophism) even if he does not know wherein the fallacy lies (cf. *PH* 2.250–3).

¹⁵⁵ For an analogous analysis of the dogmatist's (and of the 'non-mature' Pyrrhonist's) attitude toward the net of Agrippa's five tropes of suspension of judgement cf. Bailey 1990 and 2002: 257–64.

sources) any argument against AAPs clearly based on CM like the one I have suggested above, and it seems difficult to believe that the dogmatists would not have taken advantage of the opportunity to prove, in accordance with their own high standards, that AAPs were not proofs, had this been possible for them. On the contrary, the dogmatists appeared content with submitting to the Sceptic a dilemma which leaves the possibility open that AAPs are demonstrative. Although not unimpressive, however, an argument *ex silentio* such as this one is not decisive. To begin with, it is not implausible that in his account Sextus could have suppressed dangerous anti-sceptical objections. Second, I suggest that, albeit not in the *exact* form of CM, we did find the dogmatists arguing that AAP cannot be a proof:

TI09 Yes, they say, but the argument concluding that proof does not exist, if it is a proof, rejects itself. (*M* 8.479)

Although this is not a perspicuous *Consequentia Mirabilis* concluding the impossibility that AAP be a proof, I believe that conclusion is what the argument is ultimately intended to suggest.¹⁵⁶ I have clarified in section 14.3.4 above that this self-rejection charge is not a repetition of the initial περιτροπή charge; I can add now that in the mouth of the dogmatists it is not simply a further dialectical manoeuvre either. In other words, its point cannot be only that if the Sceptics say that AAP is a proof, then they are also implying, by self-application, that it is not a proof (a similar point had already been exploited by Sextus *to his own advantage* earlier at 8.472 and 8.478 (TI08)). On my reconstruction TI09 records a dogmatic attempt to prove that the sceptical AAPs cannot be PAPS; whether the opacity of the formulation is to be imputed to the dogmatists themselves (and perhaps to those features of their logics which impeded a full-blown proof by CM) or to Sextus himself is impossible to divine.

Must we conclude, then, that the Pyrrhonist's case is hopeless, since the dogmatist had a conclusive argument to establish that the sceptical AAPs cannot be proofs? My answer is, emphatically, 'no'. The dogmatist cannot limit himself to saying that AAP cannot be proof, because if it were a proof, it would not be a proof; the self-destruction which strikes the supposed demonstrativeness of AAP is bound to infect *every* other alleged proof. The attempt to prove the non-demonstrativeness of AAP by some form of

¹⁵⁶ In Castagnoli 2000 I maintained, I believe now quite unconvincingly, that the unavailability of CM in antiquity might have been sufficient to prevent the dogmatist from arguing that AAP cannot be demonstrative. I also suggested that AT (and thus the unsoundness of CM) could be taken to characterise Chrysippus' συνάρτησις without committing myself to the genuine Chrysippean endorsement of CT, which I have now endorsed in part I, chapter 6.

reductio ad absurdum of the hypothesis that AAP is a proof cannot remain insulated, as the dogmatists wish; in Sextus' hands it transforms into a *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole dogmatic conception of proof. I suggest that Sextus' compelling reasons must have been those I have introduced above: if the dogmatist is unable to locate, on the basis of his own logical standards, any specific fault in the AAPs' premisses or inferences, then he must accept that AAPs are sound proofs according to those standards but then, since AAPs conclude that no sound proof exists, the whole notion of sound proof is bracketed with them (TI10).¹⁵⁷ If the dogmatist's only reason for denying the otherwise apparent demonstrativeness of AAPs is that this entails a contradiction, then all dogmatic reasoning becomes suspect too. Although in other cases there might not be an obviously unacceptable conclusion to unmask the flaws of an argument, the dogmatic standards to judge it demonstrative have been unmasked as utterly unreliable.

On McPherran's interpretation, the final argument of *M* 8 succeeds only on the assumption that the dogmatist initially fails to notice the self-refuting character of PAP and, following Sextus' lead, condones 'extreme psychological flexibility in respect of our usual determination to maintain diachronic belief-consistency'; 'one *can* assent first to "*p*" ("This is a sound proof") and then to "not-*p*" ("This is not a sound proof") without "cancelling" the memory of one's having previously assented to "*p*" or erasing the intellectual consequences of that assent' (1987: 316). My proposal that the self-bracketing of AAP together with all the other alleged proofs is best understood as a form of *reductio ad absurdum* of the entire dogmatic conception of proof, achieved via the AAP's indistinguishability from respectable dogmatic proofs, makes McPherran's demand unnecessary: it is not in virtue of the Sceptics' own 'exotic' and 'primitive' approach to logic and argument that the final assent to not-*p* does not erase the intellectual consequences of having assented to *p*, but because of the exquisite structure of an argument which respectable modern logicians would accept as valid. Ultimately, what we are allowed to say is that Sextus accepts and embraces the self-bracketing of AAPs only in the measure in which those arguments are not *his* arguments: it is *dogmatic* logic that expunges itself, since the arguments Sextus levels against it are construed and assessed in accordance with its principles and rules.

To conclude this long section, it will not be superfluous to lay down a clarification about the double role which I have attributed to the περιγραφή argument as built at the end of *Against the Logicians*. The

¹⁵⁷ For a general attack on self-refutation arguments along these lines cf. Stack 1983: 332–3.

protagonist of that passage is the Pyrrhonist; it is the Pyrrhonist who seizes the second horn of the dogmatist's dilemma (though only as a final move on the dialectical chessboard), and thus gets involved in the self-bracketing of AAP. And self-bracketing allows him to resist the charge of περιτροπή (thus serving a defensive role) while using AAP to conclude, against the dogmatist, the non-existence of any proof (including AAP itself). It is the Pyrrhonist who uses AAP as a ladder to ascend to a 'high place', and then overturns it; no mention at all is made of the dogmatist. Where, then, is the anti-dogmatic side of the περιγραφή argument supposed to lie after all? Again: we know that the Pyrrhonist claims to be already in the desirable condition of ἐποχή about the existence of proof, being persuaded with equal force by the AAPs and by the dogmatic arguments in favour of proof. Where is the ladder supposed to take him, then, when he consents to subscribe to the second horn of his adversary's dilemma? And how does the dogmatist enter into this picture?

The ancient Pyrrhonist – the doctor Sextus reveals – is not only a skilled argument-weaver; 'being philanthropic, he wishes to cure by argument, as far as he can, the conceit and rashness of the dogmatists' (*PH* 3.280).¹⁵⁸ The Pyrrhonist is already in the sound mental condition of ἐποχή, but from such high ground he does not confine himself to scornfully gazing at his adversary, stuck in the wretched lowlands of dogmatism; he chooses to go downhill, just for a few moments, and to show the dogmatist a path out of that unhealthy place.

The dogmatist, poisoned by his own dogmatism, is strongly attached to his stringent logical standards, but at the same time finds himself in the uncomfortable position of being unable to devise any direct argument to establish that the dangerous AAPs are not, despite appearances, genuine proofs.¹⁵⁹ The Pyrrhonist, philanthropically descending from his 'high place',¹⁶⁰ shows him what he himself realised (and put into practice) in his former dogmatic life:¹⁶¹ if they cannot be defused, AAPs can become for

¹⁵⁸ ὁ σκεπτικός διὰ τὸ φιλόανθρωπος εἶναι τὴν τῶν δογματικῶν οἴησιν τε καὶ προπέτειαν κατὰ δύναμιν ἰᾶσθαι λόγῳ βούλεται.

¹⁵⁹ It is likely that the difficulty encountered in defusing AAPs is itself a source of anxiety (ταραχή) for the dogmatist.

¹⁶⁰ The descent is the counterpart of the Pyrrhonist's choice of the second horn of the dilemma ('AAP is a proof') for dialectical purposes (actually the mature Pyrrhonist suspends his judgement about proof and the demonstrativeness of AAP, and therefore stands in a high place). Clearly the descent of the Pyrrhonist, being only a dialectical and pedagogical move, does not cause him to lapse back into any form of dogmatism, not even temporarily. This is not to deny that this move might also have, at the same time, the function of confirming and strengthening the Sceptic's own stance of suspension of judgement (cf. Conway and Ward 1992: 210).

¹⁶¹ Cf. p. 277–8n82.

the dogmatist a ladder, safe enough to scale the walls of dogmatism and climb to a better place, where persuasion of the non-existence of proof will finally counterbalance the opposite belief in its existence, producing ἐποχή. They are themselves a 'dogmatic ladder' that should be overturned as soon as the summit has been reached,¹⁶² without hesitation or regrets.¹⁶³ (Or, adapting McPherran's own thought-provoking metaphor, they are homeopathic remedies by which the Pyrrhonist cures the dogmatic disease through a healthy dose of self-purging dogmatism.)

What for the mature Pyrrhonist is the last, brilliant move in a dialectical contest could represent for the dogmatist the first, crucial step towards mental health and Pyrrhonism.

¹⁶² Unlike Wittgenstein (cf. the *incipit* of part III on p. 249), of course Sextus cannot say that to reach the summit amounts to 'seeing the world rightly'. By reaching the summit and kicking away the ladder of dogmatism, however, one will assume what appears to the Sceptic to be the best and happiest attitude (suspension of judgement) towards the world (cf. *PH* 1.17: scepticism shows 'how it is possible to seem to live *correctly* (ὁρθῶς)').

¹⁶³ As with most similes, the correspondence between the comparanda is not perfect (and this contributes to making similes so interesting and rewarding). Just one question: why does Sextus say that it is the Sceptic who overturns the ladder? AAPs, when taken as proofs, *necessarily* eliminate themselves; the ladder has to fall down, independently of the Sceptic's will. In this sense, Sextus' ladder simile differs from the purgatives and fire ones, and resembles Augustine's ship (*TI* 37 on pp. 342–3) and Buddha's raft (p. 343n116).

CHAPTER 15

Scepticism and self-refutation: looking backwards

In the last chapter, when referring to Sextus Empiricus' defence of the consistency of the Pyrrhonian outlook and, notably, to the dialectical manoeuvre I baptised the 'περιγραφή argument', I have recurred to the term 'refined' more than once. My choice reflects a favourable evaluation of the intrinsic coherence and strength of Sextus' dialectical strategy, but it also alludes to its worth relative to earlier, less mature and less systematic attempts at vindicating the tenability of sceptical positions. Sextus offers us, I believe, the best condensate of at least five centuries of self-refutation charges, defences and counter-attacks which animated the debates between the ancient sceptics¹ and their adversaries. By tracking back the few surviving landmarks of the earlier stages of these debates we shall be in a better position to understand how original Sextus' approach was; at the same time, our acquaintance with the details of Sextus' late solution will be a valuable aid in illuminating our analysis.

15.1 REFLEXIVE VS. NON-REFLEXIVE SCEPTICISM: ATOMISTS, ACADEMICS AND STOICS

There is an ancient tradition picturing Democritus as a proto-sceptic: not surprisingly, most of Democritus' most radical disavowals of knowledge and its very possibility are duly reported by Sextus.² Many of them might appear exposed to some form or another of self-refutation charge; think, for example, of slogans like 'in reality we know nothing, for truth is in an abyss'³

¹ In this chapter by 'sceptics' I shall not refer narrowly to the adherents to the sceptical Academy or to the Pyrrhonian tradition, but, more generally, to all those who propounded theses and arguments which came to be interpreted, it does not matter how correctly from a historical point of view, as, roughly speaking, 'sceptical'.

² Notice, however, that Sextus himself also reports that Democritus recognised some criteria of truth (cf. *M* 7.139–40) and that a definite denial of the possibility of knowledge amounts to negative meta-dogmatism in Sextus' eyes. For the difference between the Pyrrhonian and the Democritean use of οὐ(δὲν) μάλλον cf. p. 267n53.

³ ἔτεῃ δὲ οὐδὲν ἴσμεν· ἐν βυθῷ γὰρ ἡ ἀλήθεια.

(DK68B117) and 'in reality we know nothing about anything'⁴ (DK68B7). In this chapter we shall observe similarly unqualified claims come under the dogmatic fire and we shall try to understand what kind of self-refutation was thought to be involved. Before then, however, it is worth recalling that the bulk of our evidence seems to suggest that Democritus himself somehow delimited the scope of these sceptical generalisations to sensory experience and that his condemnations of the senses were themselves far from being as univocal as they might appear.⁵

Certainly Democritus was well aware that scepticism need not be global to invite charges of self-refutation: for, as Galen reports in his polemic against the rationalist doctors, an argument (λόγος)

ΤΙΙ6 cannot even start without evidence: how could it be credible if it attacks that from which it has taken its beginnings? Democritus too knew this: when he had criticised the senses, saying 'by convention colour, by convention sweet, by convention bitter, but in reality atoms and void', he had the senses reply to the intellect as follows: 'Wretched mind, taking your evidence from us you throw us down (ἡμέας καταβάλλεις)? Our downfall would be your downfall! (πτῶμά τοι τὸ κατὰβλημα)'⁶ (DK68B125)

The loss of the broader context makes it difficult to diagnose with precision and confidence the logic underlying the senses' complaint here; however, some speculation on its rough outline can be attempted, with no pretension that it is the only possible one compatible with our multifaceted Democritean evidence. The senses present us with a reality with a rich texture of secondary qualities (colours, sounds, smells...), but Democritus' atomistic theory reveals that such qualities are not real, because the only real constituents of the world are atoms and void; neither of them is characterised by those qualities, but by different properties to which those qualities are fully reducible.⁷ In some way, then, the atomistic eliminativism devised by the intellect suggests that the senses are mistaken, or at least potentially misleading (a point epitomised in the first half of Democritus' notorious *dictum*: 'by convention colour, by convention sweet, by

⁴ ἔτεῃ οὐδὲν ἴσμεν περὶ οὐδενός.

⁵ For Aristotle's testimony on Democritus as a supporter of the thesis that all sense-impressions are true, and attempts to reconcile it with the evidence on Democritus' scepticism about the senses cf. McKim 1984, Lee 2005: 189–200.

⁶ οὐδ' ἄρξασθαι δύναται τῆς ἐναργείας χωρὶς, πῶς ἂν οὗτος πιστὸς εἴη, παρ' ἧς ἔλαβε τὰς ἀρχάς, κατὰ ταύτης θρασυνόμενος; τοῦτο καὶ Δημόκριτος εἰδώς, ὅποτε τὰ φαινόμενα διέβαλε, νόμῳ χροίῃ, νόμῳ γλυκύ, νόμῳ πικρόν, εἰπών, ἔτεῃ δ' ἄτομα καὶ κενόν, ἐποίησε τὰς αἰσθήσεις λεγούσας πρὸς τὴν διάνοιαν οὕτως· τάλαινα φρήν, παρ' ἡμέων λαβοῦσα τὰς πίστεις ἡμέας καταβάλλει; πτῶμά τοι τὸ κατὰβλημα.

⁷ For in-depth study of Democritus' conception of perception, secondary qualities and their status see Lee 2005: ch. 8.

convention bitter').⁸ The senses' harsh rejoinder is that, since the atomistic theory is built, ultimately, on the basis of sensory evidence, if the reliability of the senses is shaken, then the credibility of the whole theoretical building is equally shaken.⁹ Democritus' wrestling metaphor is the same as we encountered in the *Euthydemus* passages T2 and T3 in chapter 4 in part I: at the very moment at which the senses' trustworthiness should be thrown down by the intellect's assault, the intellect would bite the dust of the philosophical arena together with the senses in a lethal embrace. But can such an argument, by itself, establish that the senses are reliable means to the discovery of intrinsic features of reality? No, of course it cannot: but it shows that no credible theory about the world can take its evidence from the senses and at the same time convincingly discredit them. Unfortunately, we do not know what the mind's reply (if any) would have been according to Democritus: speculation here risks becoming even wilder. Suppose, however, that at least part of the evidence the mind had allegedly borrowed from the senses in constructing its atomistic physics were our everyday experience of the existence of plurality, motion, coming-to-be and passing-away, to vindicate which, against Eleatism, that theory had been devised (in partial observance, though, of Eleatic strictures);¹⁰ the mind might have replied that its specific attack on the *per se* reality of secondary qualities was not to be interpreted as a condemnation of the value of senses *tout court*, but only as a qualified dismissal of *some* sense-data (qualified because Democritus' main point seems to be that secondary qualities should not populate our basic ontology, which certainly does not mean that they do

⁸ I cannot see any clue in T116 in support of Hankinson's suggestion that the intellect's argument against the senses has itself the form of a *περιτροπή*: 'the reports of the senses are false (since if they are true, they are false, and hence they are false) ... "if if *p* then not-*p*, then not-*p*" is a theorem of propositional logic' (1995: 44). Note also the identification (in my opinion incorrect) of *περιτροπή* with *Consequentia Mirabilis*.

⁹ Baldes' (1981: 34) different account of the kernel of the argument ('if the empirical base is false, atomism is false') makes it a *nonsequitur*: of course the conclusions of a theory based on false evidence can still be true. For an echo of Democritus' argument cf. S.E. M 8.56.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Arist. *GC* 1.8, 325a23–31. Taylor suggests the further point that some features of atoms were introduced by analogy with macroscopic objects: 'the atoms themselves and their motion and inter-action were described in terms whose primary application is to the macroscopic world revealed to the senses, not only in that such adjectives as "round", "sharp", "impenetrable", and "regularly-moving", which derive their sense, directly or indirectly, from the world of experience, were applied to them, but that the mechanical processes observed to govern the macroscopic world were assumed to operate in the microscopic world also, e.g. the assumption that in the original cosmic whirl the larger atoms would collect together and the smaller apart from them depends on the assumption that their behaviour reproduces that of grains in a rotating sieve, while the whirl was conceived on the analogy of an eddy of wind or water, in which the lighter atoms are thrown out to the circumference, while the others remain in the centre.' (1967: 20) Cf. also Arist. *GC* 1.2, 315b9–11.

not play some ineliminable subjective role in our lives).¹¹ However, such a line of defence would not be unproblematic: with an 'indifference argument' typical of the Democritean arsenal,¹² the senses might have asked on what basis the mind felt entitled to trust some of their reports more than others: if the senses are revealed to be misleading (at least in some measure) about secondary qualities, why should they not be equally misleading with regard to phenomena such as plurality and motion?

Let us now return to the safer exegetical terrain of the senses' self-refutation charge in T116. I have noted above that the charge does not seem to prove that the senses must be in fact reliable means to knowledge of reality, or that any theory discrediting them must be false: the charge shows the untenability of any sense-based theory leading to conclusions which undermine, directly or indirectly, the credibility of the senses.¹³ How would such a theory be self-refuting? If we apply the distinction which I drew in part II, chapter 10, the senses' argument not only does not amount to a pragmatic self-refutation charge, but it does not follow the typical dialectical pattern of *ad hominem* reversal either: the charge is not that, since the intellect has helped itself with sensory evidence to construct its theory, it is thereby committed to admitting the reliability of the senses, thus contradicting some of its own theoretical conclusions. The charge in T116 is more reminiscent of that form of 'self-elimination without residues' which Sextus would describe as self-bracketing or self-purging (cf. chapter 14): if the senses were proved to be unreliable, as the intellect

¹¹ DK68B11 attests that knowledge through the senses, although 'bastard' or 'dark', and certainly inadequate, still merits the name of knowledge. Kirk, Raven and Schofield suggest that Democritus' answer would have been that, actually, the intellect did not start taking its evidence from the senses: 'he would have envisaged the mind as replying ...: "Not so. You tell us very few truths about the world (except that it contains many things in motion). In particular, you tell us nothing objectively true about what individual things are like ... But you do confirm the truth of the theory of atoms and void which I have worked out using the genuine sort of judgement constituted by *a priori* Eleatic reasoning"' (1983: 412–13). Barnes suggests that Democritus had no solution to the problem he posed, and thus his scepticism was genuine and involved both senses and intellect (1982a: 559–64). Taylor believes that some (milder) form of scepticism, consisting in the awareness of the impossibility of certain knowledge, given the weakness of the 'controllers' of the theory, i.e. the senses, was Democritus' own conclusion (1967: 22–4). According to Baldes (1981: 34), Democritus 'spoke against giving such empirical statements ontological significance', but 'did not thereby kick the props out from under either empirical statements or his atomism': this solution appears weak, since the problem is that the empirical evidence is supposedly used to found the ontology of atomism, and thus should have some 'ontological significance'. On Democritus' epistemology and the broad question of whether Democritus was a sceptic cf. also Curd 2001, Lee 2005: ch. 9.

¹² On indifference arguments cf. Makin 1993.

¹³ This conclusion might be extended to any theory undermining the credibility of the senses on the assumption that any theory must be, to some extent, 'sense-based'.

complains, the reliability of the intellect would also be undermined at the same time, but this would not leave the intellect (and us) automatically committed to the reliability of the senses or any other criterion of truth.¹⁴ Of course the ultimate aim of the senses' argument is to clarify that, in order to avoid its own downfall (and sceptical paralysis), the intellect is expected to revise its own dangerous conclusions concerning the senses,¹⁵ but this is a possible (and, for the senses, desirable) way out of the 'self-downthrow' charge, and not an integral part of it.

The same difference between the two logical patterns of reversal and self-elimination emerges with clarity if we compare two passages we analysed in part II, T52 and T53 (pp. 166–7), with the following two:

T117 But the argument which gets its credibility from things apparent, in the act of attacking these, rejects (συνεκβάλλει) itself as well.¹⁶ (S.E. M 8.364)

T118 So in the course of his [*sc.* Dionysius'] attack against our argument, to show that in its underlying nature the sun is large he himself uses an inference of the following kind... his argument, based on similarity (κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα) with things in our experience, will be similarly overturned (ἀνατραπήσεται) if the similarity method is not cogent.¹⁷ (Phld. *Sign.* 10, 1–26)

The charge here is not one of περιτροπή,¹⁸ unlike in T52 and T53 the problem envisaged here is not that by building one's argument, respectively, on evident premisses or inferences based on similarity one is thereby unwittingly committing oneself to the reliability of these, contradicting one's intended conclusion (i.e. the denial of that reliability). The present point is that the purported conclusion will end up having disastrous repercussions on the argument itself: if the unreliability of φαινόμενα and of the similarity method were concluded, then the reliability of the arguments leading to these very conclusions (and the credibility of their proponents)

¹⁴ Unlike the case of PAPS, the application of the intellect's conclusions to the intellect itself is indirect; by applying to the senses, they also unwittingly apply to the intellect, which takes its evidence from the senses.

¹⁵ We might say that in Democritus' argument the dogmatic intellect is not expected to become Pyrrhonian, i.e. to embrace happily its own self-bracketing (unless one decides to read T116, *à la* Barnes, as a testimony of full-blown Democritean scepticism).

¹⁶ ἀλλ' ὁ λόγος ἐκ τῶν φαινόμενων τὴν πίστιν λαμβάνων ἐν τῷ ταῦτα κινεῖν καὶ ἑαυτὸν συνεκβάλλει.

¹⁷ οὕτως δὲ κινῶν τὸν ἡμέτερον λόγον αὐτὸς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μέγαν εἶναι τὸν ἥλιον κατὰ τὸ ὑποκειμενὸν τοιαύτῃ κρᾶσι στημιώσκει... ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τὴν πρὸς τὰ παρ' ἡμῖν ἐρευνώμενος ὁμοίως ἀνατραπήσεται' εἴπερ οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τρόπος ἀναγκαστικός.

¹⁸ *Pace* McPherran (1987: 293–4), who catalogues T117 as a case of pragmatic self-refutation, and Allen (1998: 336–7), who treats T53 and T118 in the same way, as 'reversal' arguments.

would also be overturned at the same time.¹⁹ T117's vocabulary is of course reminiscent of that of T116,²⁰ but Sextus' choice of the compound συνεκβάλλειν instead of Democritus' καταβάλλειν also reminds us of the closing passage of *Against the Logicians* which we have scrutinised in chapter 14 (especially T109). The broad context of the two Sextan passages is interestingly parallel: first a charge of περιτροπή is levelled (M 8.360–1

¹⁹ To defend their view that the sun is as large as it appears ('perhaps a foot wide'; cf. Cic. *Fin.* 1.20) the Epicureans use an argument based on inference from 'partial analogy' (ἐπὶ μέρους ἀναλογισμός): the sun differs from all the other things, for which, by increase of the distance, magnitude and brightness decrease, just as the magnet, unlike everything else, alone draws iron (9, 8–37). Dionysius uses an analogical argument ('Things in our experience that make a slow reappearance from behind objects that hide them do so either because they move slowly or because their size is very great; but the sun does not move slowly') to establish the opposite conclusion that the sun is far larger than it appears, and thus undermine the reliability of similarity. Philodemus protests that if the reliability of the method of similarity is undermined, then Dionysius' argument must be itself unreliable (notice how the possibility that the method of similarity is assumed by Dionysius only for its *reductio ad absurdum* is ignored here, just as it was ignored in T52 and T53).

²⁰ For another passage clearly inspired by Democritus' fragment 125, most likely through Epicurus' medium, cf. Lucretius *DRN* 4.482–5: 'Then, what must be held in more trust than the senses? Or will reason, sprung from false sense-perception, have the power to speak against them, when it is completely derived from the senses? If they are not true, then all reason becomes false too' (*Quid maiore fide porro quam sensus haberi / debet? An ab sensu falso ratio orta valebit / dicere eos contra, quae tota ab sensibus orta est? / Qui nisi sunt veri, ratio quoque falsa fit omnis*). For analogous argumentative patterns cf. also Cic. *Luc.* 44: 'Therefore, if a reasoning which has started and progressed from things apprehended and perceived concludes that nothing can be apprehended, what could be found that is more self-conflicting?' (*Ergo si rebus comprehensis et perceptis nisa et progressa ratio hoc efficit, nihil posse comprehendere, quid potest reperiri quod ipsum sibi repugnet magis?*) and Cic. *Fin.* 1.64.

For an interesting variant on Democritus' argument in T116 cf. Aristocles' criticism of Melissus' *reductio* argument against the reliability of the senses in fr. 8 (Eus. *PE* 14.17.6–8):

νυνὶ δὲ τοῦτο καὶ τὸ ἀποπτωτὸν ἔστιν· ἀχρήστους γὰρ ἀποφαίνοντες αὐτὰς τῷ λόγῳ τοῖς ἔργοις τὰ μάλιστα χρώμενοι διατελοῦσιν αὐταῖς. ὁ γὰρ τοῖς Μελίσσος ἐθέλων ἐπιδεικνύει, διότι τῶν φαινομένων καὶ ἐν ὁμῇ τούτων οὐδὲν εἴη τῷ ὄντι, διὰ τῶν φαινομένων ἀποδείκνυσιν αὐτῶν... ταῦτα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ τοιαῦτα λέγοντος αὐτοῦ καὶ μάλα εἰκότως ἐπιθετό τις ἂν· Ἄρ' οὖν ὅτι θερμὸν ἔστι κᾶπειτα τοῦτο γίνεται ψυχρόν, οὐκ αἰσθόμενος ἔγνω; ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων. ὅπερ γὰρ ἔφη, εὐρεθείη ἂν οὐδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἀναιρῶν καὶ ἐλέγχων διὰ τὸ μάλιστα πιστεῦειν αὐταῖς.

Now this is also the most absurd thing: while asserting by argument that [the senses] are useless, in practice they continually rely heavily upon them. And Melissus, who wants to show why none of the phenomena and the things we see exists in reality, proves it by means of the phenomena themselves... When he says these things [*sc.* Melissus' attack on the senses in DK3088], and many more of the same kind, one might reasonably enough ask him: 'Was it not by the senses, then, that you have come to know that what is now hot later becomes cold?' And similarly also in the other cases. For, as I have said, he will be found to be eliminating and refuting (ἀναιρῶν καὶ ἐλέγχων) the senses by means of a strong trust in them.

Unlike the 'wretched mind' in T116, Melissus is not charged with using the senses to build the foundations and basic concepts of a philosophical theory (monism) which denies the reliability of the senses, but with using the senses (in particular the observation of constant perceptual change) to attack the senses themselves. But in this way Aristocles is clearly missing the point of Melissus' argument, which is meant to be a sort of *reductio* of the reliability of the senses (for discussion of Melissus' fragment and Aristocles' argument and its shortcomings cf. Barnes 1982a: 298–302).

(T52) and *M* 8.463–4 (T103)), then Sextus pleads not guilty because of his attitude of suspension of judgement towards the conflicting appearances he sets in opposition (*M* 8.362–3 and *M* 8.477 (T107)), and finally the dogmatist protests that the Sceptic's argument is exposed to self-rejection (*M* 8.364 (T117) and *M* 8.479 (T109)), and not, again, to reversal.²¹

The kernel of T117 and T118, like that of T109 and unlike that of the corresponding περιτροπή passages T52 and T53 (and T103), lies in *reflexivity*: the conclusions of those arguments also apply to the arguments, and so (indirectly) to themselves as well, by targeting the premisses and methods of inference adopted. Although the greater part of the relevant Hellenistic writings is lost, our extant sources suggest that the question as to whether one's sceptical claims do or do not apply to themselves, and of what risks underlie both options, was central in the debate between sceptics and dogmatists.

Let us start from a renowned Lucretian passage:

T119 Now, if someone thinks that nothing is known, he does not even know whether that can be known, since he admits to knowing nothing. I shall therefore refrain from arguing my case against this man who has himself stood with his own head in his footprints.²² (*DRN* 4.469–72)

These lines, and in particular the last one, have puzzled editors and interpreters for a long time,²³ until Burnyeat (1978) conclusively demonstrated that they express some kind of self-refutation charge against the Sceptic. The final image does not refer to any otherwise unattested proverbial saying, but is most likely Lucretius' own imaginative poetic transposition into Latin of the literal meaning of Epicurus' Greek phrase περικάτω τρέπεται (cf. T46 on p. 148): the Sceptic who thinks and claims that nothing is known is depicted as ending up 'with his own head in his footprints', i.e. facing backwards (περί) as well as upside down (κάτω). This awkward position might be the result of some gymnastic move or acrobatic contortion, as Burnyeat (1978: 198) suggests;²⁴ alternatively, Lucretius' phrase might allude to the position in which ancient wrestlers were forced by their opponents through a technique which, as I have conjecturally suggested on

²¹ Sextus' reply to the self-rejection charge is different in the two cases, however.

²² *Denique nil sciri si quis putat, id quoque nescit an sciri possit, quoniam nil scire fatetur. Hunc igitur contra mittam contendere causam, qui capite ipse suo in statuit vestigia sese.*

²³ For detailed discussion of the previous literature on the passage cf. Burnyeat 1978: 197–200.

²⁴ Sedley has convincingly argued that a good reason for retaining *suo* at line 472, resisting the normalising emendation to *sua* adopted by most editors since Lachmann, is that Lucretius might be consciously deploying 'syntactical onomatopoeia': 'intellectual contortion is symbolised by contorted grammar, with the proper order *statuit in* reversed in defiance of basic syntax' (1998: 47).

p. 156, could have been labelled περικάτω τρέπειν. Consider for example the kind of heave represented by the bronze figurine on p. 158: besides being upside down, the heaved wrestler is probably about to end up with 'his own head in his footprints'. Either way, the Sceptic is portrayed as someone who forces *himself* into that embarrassing inverted position, without any intervention of his opponent ('I shall therefore refrain from arguing my case against this man').

But how does the Sceptic condemn himself to reversal? Let us reconstruct the argument underlying T119 step by step:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| (1) Nothing is known | Sceptic's thesis |
| (2) Therefore, the Sceptic does not know anything | from (1) |
| (3) Therefore, the Sceptic does not even know whether it can be known that nothing is known | from (2) |

In virtue of his claim (1) the Sceptic is implicitly admitting not only (2) that *he himself* does not have knowledge of anything, including the thesis he has just advanced, but also (3) that he does not know whether that thesis *can* be known at all (and not simply whether that thesis is true).

Does this admission amount to a falsification of the proposition 'Nothing is known'? The answer is, obviously, 'no': the fact that the Sceptic must coherently admit that he does not know whether that proposition is true, and even allow the possibility that this cannot be known at all, neither implies the falsehood of that proposition nor dialectically forces an admission that it is false. Burnyeat emphasises this point, but since he supposes that any περιτροπή argument must have as its conclusion the falsehood of the reversed thesis, he feels obliged to explain why the reversal imagery occurs here. His solution is that given the dialectical background presupposed by Lucretius' discussion, to admit that one does not know one's thesis to be true²⁵ is the same as withdrawing from the fight and conceding victory to one's opponent, since 'no sense is left for one's furnishing reason,

²⁵ I have suggested above that Lucretius' precise wording seems to indicate something different: the Sceptic's admission that he does not know *whether his thesis can be known*. For simplifications of the Sceptic's admission analogous to Burnyeat's ('must in consistency admit he does not know even this, that he knows nothing' (1978: 205)) cf. Bailey 1947: vol. III, 1237 ('a man who thinks that nothing can be known does not even know whether knowledge is possible'), Brunschwig 1996: 22n7, Sedley 1998: 87 ('the sceptic's thesis undermines his own commitment to it, in that he cannot claim to know whether it is true'), and Godwin's largely inexact translation ('Then again, anyone who thinks that nothing is known is also inca pable of knowing whether his ignorance is known either, since he admits to knowing nothing' (1986: 37, italics mine)).

evidence or proof for' one's thesis (1978: 206); this, in turn, is tantamount to conceding the truth of one's opponent's thesis and thus the falsehood of one's own. If this is Lucretius' implicit line of reasoning in T119, it is far from unassailable: even if admittedly I do not know whether *p* is true, it still appears perfectly sensible on my part to put forward plausible reasons and arguments in favour of *p*, to decide together with my interlocutor whether they are sufficient to prove the truth of *p*, and thus make *p* known to us, or at least to counterbalance the opposite reasons and arguments for not-*p*. To bar this possibility tacitly appears an unwarranted move, and even more so to interpret any disavowal of knowledge that *p* as an admission of the truth of not-*p*.

This is not to claim that Burnyeat's reconstruction must be incorrect: this would not be the first occasion on which we encounter a self-refutation charge tacitly relying on some kind of question-begging presupposition.²⁶ None the less, a slightly different interpretation is possible. Even granting Burnyeat's persuasive suggestion that Lucretius is giving us a one-line picturesque representation of the Epicurean περικάτω τρέπειν jargon, and that in the Hellenistic period the περιτροπή vocabulary usually suggested a reversal into the explicit admission of the contradictory of one's original thesis, we can still suppose that in T119 Lucretius meant to convey the looser and weaker point that the Sceptic is unable to defend his own position without the further implication that he is thereby committed to his adversary's. In other words, the image might be meant to depict the Sceptic's self-defeat and retreat from the dialectical arena as soon as (and as a consequence of the very fact that) he advances the thesis that nothing is known (he heads back to where he comes from, since his head is stuck in his *vestigia*), and his incapacity to engage in serious dialectic and stand by his thesis facing opposition (he is no longer looking in the direction of his interlocutor). In this case the Sceptic's tumble away from commitment to what he says should not be taken as a conversion *towards* something else definite, i.e. his adversary's opposite position.

The Sceptic is not worth taking seriously and arguing against, not necessarily because he is already unwittingly bound to your own opposite position, but because he is innocuous, since he cannot make any serious effort to undermine it which is not based on avowed knowledge. In light of what I have suggested above and of the kind of noncommittal dialectical strategies open to the Sceptic which we have analysed in chapter 14, this is

²⁶ Notice that on Burnyeat's reconstruction Lucretius' T119 would be very similar to the Sextan passages in which the charge of περιτροπή appears to include the first horn of the anti-sceptical dilemmas, i.e. unconvincing bare assertion (cf. pp. 164–5 and 175–6).

already a very dubious consequence to force upon the Sceptic, but arguably less so than the supposition that he is involuntarily conceding the truth of his opponent's view when implicitly admitting that he does not know whether 'his' is true or can be known to be true. Lucretius' exact wording in T119 ('he does not even know whether that [*sc.* that nothing is known] can be known') might play some role here: it is one thing to debate and even support a thesis which you admit you do not know to be true, but about which you know that, if it were true, it could be known to be so, another to debate a thesis of which you do not even know whether knowledge can ever be attained. I believe that in the latter case there is still room for genuine philosophical discussion, but one might argue that there is less room than in the former.²⁷

Besides the problem of unveiling the significance of its final one-line image, T119 poses two related exegetical challenges: identifying Lucretius' historical target and source. Many commentators have conjectured that the version of scepticism in the dock had to be some form of 'atomistic scepticism', as embodied for example by Metrodorus of Chius (fourth century BC),²⁸ who became renowned in antiquity for the sceptical *incipit* of his *On Nature*. In an outstanding study published in 1996, Brunschwig inspected the logic and plausibility of all the variants which have been transmitted to us by our different sources and made a strong conjectural case for Cicero's being the source not only closest in time, but also most faithful to the Metrodorean original *incipit*:

T120 I say that we do not know whether we know something or we know nothing, and that we do not know this very thing either, or in general whether something exists or nothing exists.²⁹ (Cic. *Luc.* 73)

²⁷ Godwin's comment that Lucretius 'argues *a priori* that the proposition "I know that I know nothing" is analytically self-refuting, with the stock reasoning that knowledge of one's own ignorance is none the less knowledge' (1986: 120) completely misses the point.

²⁸ Cf. e.g. Ernout and Robin 1925–8: vol. II, 226–7, Bailey 1947: vol. III, 1238, Burnyeat 1978: 204. For the different view that the sceptical Academy was Lucretius' target cf. Vander Waerdt 1989: 242n48, Schrijvers 1992: 127–8.

²⁹ *Nego scire nos sciamusne aliquid an nihil sciamus, ne id ipsum quidem scire nos, nec omnino sitne aliquid an nihil sit.*

I quote and translate the text proposed by Brunschwig: most manuscripts have *ne id ipsum quidem nescire aut scire nos*, while MSS A and B, followed by most editors, have the further correction *ne id ipsum quidem nescire aut scire <scire> nos*. For an excellent overview of the possible construals of the text and their shortcomings cf. Brunschwig 1996: 33–5. Sedley also prefers Cicero's version, but in its standard edition, which he translates as follows: 'I say that we do not know whether we know something or nothing, nor do we know that very thing, knowing or not knowing, nor in general whether anything exists or nothing' (1992: 27). Barnes' (1982a: 445) translation merges Eusebius' version (*PE* 14.19.9: οὐδεις ἡμῶν οὐδέν οἶδεν οὐδ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο, πρότερον οἶδαμεν ἢ οὐκ οἶδαμεν) with the second and third clause of Cicero's in its standard edition: 'None of us knows anything,

If this accurately reflects Metrodorus' actual position,³⁰ it is difficult to imagine that he might have been the intended target of Lucretius (or Lucretius' original source): for on Cicero's account Metrodorus does not assert that nothing is known unqualifiedly, as if he, or anyone else, could know that what he claims is true.³¹ Metrodorus is extremely careful in emphasising the reflexivity of his own scepticism: that nothing is known by us is not something we know to be true, and also this second-order ignorance is in turn explicitly excluded as the possible object of any higher-order knowledge ('we do not know this very thing either'). If levelled at Metrodorus, Lucretius' criticism in T119 would seem to be quixotic.³²

What historical figure might then hide beneath Lucretius' indefinite pronoun *quis* ('someone')? Sedley reminds us that 'the simple unrefined denial that anything is known was endemic in the atomist tradition' (1998: 86); we had a taste above of a couple of Democritean pronouncements, which, at least if taken out of context, have that kind of flavour. According to Sedley, it is against such a form of generic denial that T119's charge was devised and levelled by Epicurus, Lucretius' only source,³³ thus forcing the question of the reflexive or non-reflexive status of one's sceptical utterances

not even that very fact whether we know or do not know; nor do we know what not to know and to know are, nor, in general, whether anything is or is not'.

³⁰ Brunschwig suggests that the third, more ontological clause might be Cicero's own addition (1996: 36–7), since there is no trace of anything similar in the other sources. However, analogous ideas are attributed to the atomists Anaxarchus (S. E. M 7.88; cf. p. 14n6) and Nausiphanes (Sen. Mor. 88.43).

³¹ I do not agree with Brunschwig that Lucretius' 'adversaire, contrairement à Métrodore, prétend donc savoir qu'on ne peut rien savoir' (1996: 22n7), or with Schrijvers that Lucretius 'combat le doute "socratique" ("je sais que je ne sais rien") en démontrant qu'un dogme pareil se réfute lui-même' (1992: 127). Sedley believes that Lucretius' 'argument assumes, on the contrary, that the Sceptic has not stated any position on whether he does or does not know the truth of his sceptical claim. The inference that he must admit to not knowing whether it is true is the Epicurean's own triumphant move, which we are not meant to understand as having been anticipated by the Sceptic. Hence this self-refutation argument is most likely to be one which was constructed before the reflexive and non-reflexive versions of scepticism had been formulated and differentiated' (1998: 85–6).

³² Cf. Schrijvers 1992: 128. It seems, rather, that Lucretius uses Metrodorus against his real target, to show what a consistent scepticism should look like (cf. Isnardi Parente 1984: 120). Not even on the standard edition of Cicero's text does Metrodorus appear to be a strong candidate for the role of Lucretius' target: although no declaration of reflexivity occurs, still Metrodorus does not assert that nothing is known, but that we do not know whether something or nothing is known, thus escaping Lucretius' charge. On the standard Ciceronian text (cf. n. 29 above), the following Lucretian charge that the Sceptic cannot know what knowledge and ignorance are (4.474–5) would also lose much of its bite if addressed to Metrodorus, who himself would make a point of declaring that we do not know what knowing and not knowing are at the very beginning of his work.

³³ *Contra* Vander Waerdt 1989 and Schrijvers 1992.

into the open and prompting various Hellenistic solutions.³⁴ This is a plausible conjecture if we assume, with Sedley and all the other commentators, that in T119 Lucretius' move consists in merely pointing out that one who says that nothing is known must admit to not knowing this very thing either, i.e. admit that one's sceptical utterance is reflexive.³⁵ I have suggested, however, that the Latin *id quoque nescit an sciri possit*, if taken literally, can indicate something rather more complex: one thing the Sceptic does not know is whether it is possible to know that nothing is known, i.e. whether his scepticism can be non-reflexive or must be reflexive.³⁶ If we take it at face value (and I do not see conclusive reasons for refusing to do so), then T119 might be targeting someone already displaying some degree of sophistication, who claims that nothing is known and

- (1) either adds that he knows only this very thing, or
- (2) clarifies that this cannot be known either, or
- (3) anyway believes he is authorised to investigate further the issue of scepticism-reflexivity.

Lucretius would be arguing that such second-order qualifications, and any debate about them, are actually precluded by that first-order sceptical claim (although it is not necessary to attribute to him, or his source,³⁷ full awareness of all the possible implications of the self-refutation charge as formulated in T119). As we have seen above, such an argument is still far from being unassailable, but it is more interesting and sophisticated than it would appear to be on its standard interpretation.

Second-order reflections of this kind are also well attested in the limited remnants of the debates on the consistency of scepticism featuring as main actors Academics, Stoics and Pyrrhonists. Let us attempt to reconstruct some strands of these fascinating debates from the following passages of Cicero's *Academica* (*Academic Books*) and Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones* (*Divine Institutions*):

³⁴ According to Sedley (1998: 87), the explicitly reflexive formulations of Metrodorus' statement (cf. e.g. Eusebius' version on p. 317n29) are later retrojections, exactly like the explicitly non-reflexive disavowal of knowledge attributed to Socrates within the sceptical Academy (cf. p. 323n48).

³⁵ Cf. p. 315n25.

³⁶ On this reading, the following concession at line 473 ('and anyway, even allowing that he knows *this...*') would be that the Sceptic can know (and thus say) whether 'Nothing is known' is itself a possible object of knowledge.

³⁷ In light of the level of sophistication apparently reached by Metrodorus, we should not exclude the possibility that Epicurus is Lucretius' source even on my proposed interpretation of T119, since, *contra* Sedley, pre-Epicurean atomists might have started reflecting on the logic and consistency of their sceptical claims (after all, Democritus' fr. 125 (T116 on p. 309) can be seen as such a reflection).

- T121 And so Arcesilaus used to deny that there is anything that can be known, not even that very thing which Socrates had left for himself, that he knew he knew nothing.³⁸ (Cic. *Ac.* 1.45)
- T122 They [*sc.* the philosophers attacked by Arcesilaus] can reply: 'If you prove that we know nothing and that we are not wise because we know nothing, then you are not wise either, because you confess that you know nothing too'. What was then Arcesilaus' achievement, except that of dispatching all the philosophers and then perishing on the same sword himself?³⁹ (Lact. *Div. Inst.* 3.5.8)
- T123 From this sprang what Hortensius demanded, that you [*sc.* the Academics] should say that that very thing at least is perceived by the wise man, namely, that nothing can be perceived. But when Antipater used to make the same demand, claiming that for someone who affirmed that nothing can be perceived it is consistent (*consentaneum*) to say that that one thing can be perceived, that the other things cannot,⁴⁰ Carneades would resist him with greater acumen. For he said that, so far from being consistent, this is maximally inconsistent. For the person who denies there is anything that is perceived makes no exception; therefore, it is necessary that not even that very thing, since it has not been excepted, can in any way be apprehended and perceived. Antiochus seemed to get to this point more closely (*pressius*): because the Academics hold it as doctrine (*decretum*) . . . that nothing can be perceived, they ought not to vacillate over their doctrine in the way they do over other matters . . . This, therefore, was a better way to demand from them that they say they perceive at least this one thing, that nothing is perceived.⁴¹ (Cic. *Luc.* 28–9)
- T124 And yet you refer to that well-tried and often rejected demand, not in Antipater's way but, as you say, 'more closely' (*pressius*); for Antipater was criticised because he said that it is consistent (*consentaneum*) for someone who affirms

³⁸ Itaque Arcesilas negabat esse quicquam quod sciri posset, ne illud quidem ipsum quod Socrates sibi reliquisset, ut nihil scire se sciret.

³⁹ Possunt enim sic respondere: Si nihil nos scire convincis, et ideo non esse sapientes, quia nihil sciamus; ergone tu quidem es sapiens, quia te quoque confiteris nihil scire? Quid ergo promovit Arcesilas, nisi quod confectis omnibus philosophis, seipsum quoque eodem mucrone transfixit?

⁴⁰ As Burnyeat notices (1997: 280n10), here *ut* is ambiguous between concessive ('even though other things cannot') and expegetic (the sense I have chosen).

⁴¹ Ex hoc illud est natum, quod postulabat Hortensius, ut id ipsum saltem perceptum a sapiente diceretis, nihil posse percipi. Sed Antipatro hoc idem postulanti, cum diceret ei qui adfirmaret nihil posse percipi unum tamen illud dicere percipi posse consentaneum esse ut alia non possent, Carneades acutius resistebat. Nam tantum abesse dicebat ut id consentaneum esset, ut maxime etiam repugnaret. Qui enim negaret quicquam esse quod perciperetur, eum nihil excipere; ita necesse esse ne id ipsum quidem quod exceptum non esset comprehendi et percipi ullo modo posse. Antiochus ad istum locum *pressius* videbatur accedere. Quoniam enim id haberent Academici decretum . . . nihil posse percipi, non debere eos in suo decreto sicut in ceteris rebus fluctuari . . . Hoc igitur modo potius erat ab his postulandum ut hoc unum saltem, percipi nihil posse, perceptum esse dicerent.

that nothing can be apprehended to say that this very thing at least can be apprehended. That seemed crass and self-contradictory (*sibi ipsum contrarium*) to Antiochus too; for it cannot be consistently said that nothing can be apprehended, if one says of anything that it can be apprehended. The way he thinks Carneades should rather have been pressed is the following: to have him admit that since the wise man can have no doctrine (*decretum*) unless it is apprehended, perceived and known, this very doctrine, that nothing can be apprehended, because it is of the wise man, is perceived. As if the wise man had no other doctrine and could live his life without doctrines! But just as he holds those as persuasive, not perceived (*probabilia non percepta*), so with this very one, that nothing can be perceived.⁴² (Cic. *Luc.* 109–10)

- T125 I [*sc.* Catulus] return back to my father's view, which indeed he used to say was Carneades': I think that nothing can be perceived, yet I also think that a wise man will assent to what is not perceived, i.e. will opine, but in such a way that he understands he is opining and knows there is nothing that can be apprehended and perceived. Little⁴³ approving that suspension of judgement about everything, I strongly assent (*vehementer adsentior*) to that other view, that there is nothing that can be perceived.⁴⁴ (Cic. *Luc.* 148)

Let us summarise the various distinct positions and moves on the dialectical chessboard which we can disentangle and reconstruct from these testimonies, on the basis of their broader contexts:⁴⁵

- (i) In the third and second century BC the Academics Arcesilaus and Carneades famously attacked the Stoic epistemological cornerstone and criterion of truth, the 'apprehensive' or 'cognitive' impression (καταληπτική φαντασία), with a battery of arguments for ἀκαταληψία, i.e. the universal conclusion that 'nothing can be

⁴² Et tamen illud usitatum et saepe repudiatum refert, non ut Antipater, sed ut ais *pressius*; nam Antipatrum reprensus quod diceret consentaneum esse ei qui adfirmaret nihil posse comprehendi id ipsum saltem dicere posse comprehendi. Quod ipsi Antiocho pingue videbatur et sibi ipsum contrarium; non enim potest convenienter dici nihil comprehendi posse, si quicquam comprehendi posse dicatur. Illo modo potius putat arguendum fuisse Carneadem, cum sapientis nullum decretum esse possit nisi comprehensum perceptum cognitum, ut hoc ipsum decretum, quod sapientis esset, nihil posse percipi, fateretur esse perceptum. Proinde quasi sapiens nullum aliud decretum habeat et sine decretis vitam agere possit! Sed ut illa habet probabilia non percepta, sic hoc ipsum nihil posse percipi. For the text chosen cf. Burnyeat 1997: 281–2n16.

⁴³ The manuscripts have *per*; following Long and Sedley 1987: vol. II, 451, Burnyeat 1997: 306 and Brittain 2001: 80–2, I accept Davies' suggestion *parum*. For a list of other proposed emendations cf. Brittain 2001: 80n13.

⁴⁴ Egone ad patris revolvor sententiam, quam quidem ille Carneadeam esse dicebat, ut percipi nihil putem posse, adsensurum autem non percepto, id est opinaturum sapientem existumem, sed ita ut intellegat se opinari sciatque nihil esse quod comprehendi et percipi possit. Parum epochen illam omnium rerum comprobans, illi alteri sententiae, nihil esse quod percipi possit, vehementer adsentior.

⁴⁵ My understanding of Cicero's passages, of their context and of Academic scepticism in general is particularly indebted to Burnyeat 1997 and Brittain 2001.

apprehended'.⁴⁶ *Nihil potest comprehendi* ('nothing can be apprehended'), *nihil potest percipi* ('nothing can be perceived') and *nihil potest sciri* ('nothing can be known') are used in the passages above in ways which, for our present purposes, can be considered interchangeable as formulations of that conclusion.

- (2) Is this conclusion something which the Academics claim to apprehend or know to be true? One might have expected to find their adversaries united in levelling a charge to the effect that the Academics themselves must acknowledge that they do not, and cannot, apprehend anything at all, *including* the truth (and knowability) of their own ἀκαταληψία principle ('non-apprehension' applies to itself). We find such an indictment against Arcesilaus only in the late passage from Lactantius (c. 240–320 AD), T122, but we cannot identify its precise source (Cicero himself?).
- (3) With a surprising strategy, instead, the second century BC Stoic Antipater seems to have suggested that when one says that 'nothing can be apprehended' one can (or perhaps must) be taken to be making the *implicit exception* of this very thing, and thus it is still consistent to say that 'it can be apprehended that nothing can be apprehended' (T123 and T124). Therefore, when Carneades, Antipater's direct target, concludes his anti-Stoic arguments proclaiming that nothing can be apprehended, he has not excluded the possibility that something, i.e. the inapprehensibility of everything *else*, is an object of apprehension and it would be consistent (*consentaneum*) for him to admit this. Antipater's aim was presumably to show that through his anti-Stoic arguments and conclusions Carneades had not managed to establish (or even state) universal ἀκαταληψία and, consequently, the necessity of universal suspension of judgement. According to Burnyeat, Antipater's charge is not that Carneades had failed to make his conclusion explicitly reflexive, but that he *could not* do so. Borrowing a pattern of argument similar to the so-called διαλεληθὼς λόγος ('Elusive Argument'),⁴⁷ Antipater would have argued that since the support of Carneades' conclusion is 'at bottom inductive' (cf. *Luc.* 42), being based on the analysis of other impressions, it cannot apply to itself too: 'there will always be one statement [*sc.* the conclusion] that eludes his argument' (1997: 288). This interesting idea is admittedly speculative, and one might object that in response to Antipater Carneades will merely assert that he is not making any exception, without *arguing* for the possibility

⁴⁶ On Stoic cognitive impressions and the Academic arguments against them cf. Frede 1983 and Schofield 1999.

⁴⁷ Cf. e.g. Plut. *Prof. Virt.* 75c.

of self-reference (cf. point (4) below). Moreover, any (non-complete) induction is bound, by its very nature, to leave some relevant instances out. My slightly different proposal, perhaps more plausible as an interpretation of the text, is thus that the *statement* itself 'Nothing can be apprehended' is intrinsically elusive. Not even making its reflexivity explicit would help: the propositional content of the statement 'Nothing can be apprehended, not even this very thing' has not been (and cannot be) ruled out as a possible object of apprehension by means of its linguistic expression.⁴⁸

- (4) Carneades protests that when the Academics claim that 'nothing can be apprehended' they are not making any explicit exception (unlike Arcesilaus' Socrates in T121) or allowing any implicit one: their conclusion also applies to itself, and they are perfectly happy to say (*pace* Lactantius) that that nothing is apprehended is something which they do not apprehend (cf. Arcesilaus in T121) and which, in general, cannot be apprehended (T123). Notice that what is standardly interpreted as the core of Lucretius' self-refutation charge (if you say that nothing is known, you cannot know this very thing either), would be eagerly embraced by Arcesilaus, Carneades and all the Academic sceptics, at least within the framework of the discussion of that particularly demanding criterion represented by the Stoic cognitive impression.⁴⁹
- (5) Antipater's anti-sceptical tactic is censured not only by his Academic foes, but also by his Stoic or Stoicising colleagues (T123 and T124). According to the first century BC Stoicising Academic Antiochus, the sensible strategy to adopt against Carneades is different: since the Academics appear to hold as a 'principle' or 'doctrine' (*decretum*)⁵⁰ that nothing can be apprehended, they must be forced into admitting to apprehending at least this, that nothing can be apprehended. How does this differ from Antipater's manoeuvre, and how is it supposed to embarrass the Academic sceptics? The difference is, I believe,

⁴⁸ On my proposed interpretation T130 on p. 331 would be a close logical parallel.

As Burnyeat (1997: 290–300) suggests, Antipater's move might have been inspired by Arcesilaus' own interpretation of Socrates as a sceptic who made claims such as 'I know nothing, except this very thing' or 'The only thing I know is that I know nothing else' (cf. T121 above and, for more pellucid formulations, *Luc.* 74 and *Ac.* 1.16; these formulations were most probably inspired by Pl. *Apol.* 21b4–5). For the question of whether Socrates did claim to know that he knew nothing cf. Fine 2008. For Arcesilaus as the first interpreter of Socrates as a sceptic cf. Long 1988a: 156–60, Britain 2001: 191–201; for Socrates in the Academic tradition cf. Ioppolo 1995, Glucker 1997, Bett 2006.

⁴⁹ This is by no means a sign of the 'general sceptical tolerance for apparent self-refutation', *pace* Hankinson (1995: 86).

⁵⁰ This is Cicero's rendering of the Greek δόγμα (cf. *Luc.* 27).

subtle. While Antipater had only argued that Carneades' conclusion had left the *possibility* unscathed that something (i.e. at least itself) was an object of actual or potential apprehension, and that therefore Carneades had failed to undermine the Stoic position in its fullest generality, Antiochus presses his adversaries 'more closely' (*pressius*):⁵¹ their problem is not that they have failed to rule out completely the possible existence of Stoic apprehensive impressions, but that they themselves are already positively, albeit involuntarily, committed to their actual *existence*. For, according to Antiochus, the only explanation and justification for them holding their principle of ἀκαταληψία so dearly must be that they believe they have apprehended it.⁵² But, then, (a) their ἀκαταληψία and ἐποχή cannot be as complete as they boast and (b), more importantly, they are guilty of self-refutation, because in the very act of expressing their *decretum* that nothing (without exceptions, as Carneades himself was eager to emphasise against Antipater) can be apprehended, they reveal their conviction that there is something they have apprehended (i.e. this very thing).⁵³

- (6) The Academic sceptics' reply consists in clarifying that the fact that ἀκαταληψία is their flagship 'doctrine' does not imply that they hold

⁵¹ Burnyeat (1997: 282–3) interprets this differently, as a reference to Antipater's unusual unwillingness to come to close quarters with Carneades in live dialectical debate, and to his exclusive reliance on *writing* to refute him.

⁵² This can be explained, with Burnyeat, by assuming that Antiochus is forcing upon his Academic adversaries, in a rather question-begging way, the demanding epistemological standards of the Stoic 'wise man' (σοφός), which had been first invoked, however, by the early Academic sceptics themselves against the Stoics (1997: 284). At *Luc.* 27 we are told that a wise man's *decretum* must be not only true, but also stable (*stabile*), settled (*fixum*), ratified (*ratum*) and immovable by any argument. For an analogous charge of inconsistency (ἐαυτοῖς μάχονται) between the Academics' assertion of ἀκαταληψία and their dogmatic assertion of some things (including ἀκαταληψία itself) and denial of others, probably aimed against the Metrodorean-Philonian mild brand of scepticism (cf. point (6) below), cf. Aenesidemus *ap. Phot. Bibl.* 212, 170a17–38. Cf. also Ammon. in *Cat.* 2, 13–17 for a dilemmatic argument along the following lines: someone who asserts ἀκαταληψία does so either by saying that he does not know ἀκαταληψία or by saying that he knows it; but in the first case he will not be credible, in the second he is admitting the existence of knowledge. The dilemma is strongly reminiscent of the anti-sceptical dilemmas which we analysed in chapter 10 and section 3 of chapter 14; surprisingly Ammonius attributes this argument to Plato.

⁵³ For an analogous charge cf. Lact. *Div. Inst.* 3.6.12: 'So anyone who declares *ex cathedra*, as it were, that nothing is known makes his declaration as if it were something perceived and known, therefore something can be known' (*Itaque qui velut sententiae loco pronuntiat, nihil sciri, tamquam perceptum proficitur et cognitum, ergo aliquid sciri potest*). Notice the usual phenomenon for which the real dialectical conclusion, the unwitting *admission* of the possibility of knowledge by its denier, is presented by Lactantius as an absolute one.

According to Favorinus' report in Gellius (*NA* 11.5.8), Pyrrhonists and Academics differ 'in particular because the Academics apprehend, as it were (*quasi comprehendunt*), this very thing, that nothing can be apprehended (*nihil posse comprehendere*), and believe, as it were (*quasi decernunt*), that nothing can be believed (*nihil posse decernere*), while the Pyrrhonists say that not even that nothing seems to be true seems in any way true' (cf. also S.E. *PH* 1.226 on p. 327n61).

it as something they have apprehended according to the demanding Stoic standards. On a Clitomachean reading of Carneades (cf. T124), ἀκαταληψία does not differ from all the other Academic 'doctrines', which are 'approved' as *persuasive* but not assented to and believed as objects of apprehension (*probabilia non percepta*);⁵⁴ on the milder (Metrodorean-Philonian?)⁵⁵ interpretation of Carneadean scepticism represented by Catulus in T125, which allows assent and belief eschewing complete ἐποχή, that nothing is apprehended is an impression rationally assented to and believed to be true, but at the same time recognised as fallible, provisional and *non-apprehensive*.⁵⁶

Various moves and countermoves in this complex debate remind us of ingredients we have found in Sextus' defence of the consistency of his Pyrrhonism. Antiochus' attack (point (5)), for example, follows the same lines as the accusation that the Pyrrhonist, when uttering his typical sceptical formulae, is slipping into dogmatism and falling short of his ideal of ἐποχή. Antipater's manoeuvre (point (3)) is reminiscent of Sextus' dialectical concession that AAPs are the only genuine proofs, and their conclusion must thus be understood as containing an implicit exception ('No proof except this one exists'); the same sort of considerations which had prompted Carneades to reject Antipater's venomous gift (point (4)) must have lain behind the Pyrrhonists' refusal to follow the route of postulating a particular status for their arguments (cf. chapter 14, section 3.4). One of the Academic solutions to the Antiochean-style challenge (point (6)) can also be interestingly compared with Sextus': Clitomachus' distinction between 'approving' something as persuasive (πιθανόν) and assenting to it as an object of apprehension is reminiscent of, albeit not equivalent to, Sextus'

⁵⁴ Cf. *Luc.* 104. On this distinction cf. Frede 1984, Bett 1990. For a similar position cf. Gal. *Opt. Doctr.* 1.41, 13–14: '[Favorinus] said that it appeared persuasive to him that nothing is apprehensible' (εἶρηκε πιθανόν ἐαυτῷ φαίνεσθαι, μηδὲν εἶναι καταληπτόν).

⁵⁵ Cf. Brittain 2001 (the reference is to Metrodorus of Stratonicea and Philo of Larissa); *contra* Glucker 2004.

⁵⁶ This defeasibility does not imply subjective weakness: in T125 ἀκαταληψία is said to be something 'vehemently' (*vehementer*) assented to and even *known* (*sciat*) by the Sceptic. On this understanding of Carneades' stance, ἀκαταληψία is still something *probabile*, and not *perceptum*, but πιθανόν indicates in this case more than a subjective persuasiveness sufficient for action: it signals an objective worth as a criterion of truth for rational, albeit fallible and provisional, assent and belief ('the probable'). For a seminal discussion of this form of 'dogmatic scepticism', as opposed to the 'classical scepticism' of Clitomachus' Carneades and Sextus Empiricus, cf. Frede 1984. According to Brittain (2001: 129–68) in his later 'Roman books' Philo appears to have rejected the Stoic definition of κατέληψις and maintained that a non-Stoic kind of fallible apprehension is possible. On this reading, Philo of Larissa would have probably said that it can be apprehended (in *his* sense) that nothing, without exceptions, can be apprehended in the Stoic sense.

distinction between acquiescing (εὐδοκεῖν) in appearances and assenting dogmatically to truth-claims concerning non-evident matters of fact, and the corresponding two senses of δόγμα(τιζεῖν).⁵⁷

Is the declared reflexivity of 'nothing can be apprehended' (point (4)) the Academic *doppelgänger* of the self-bracketing of the Pyrrhonian φωναί? Here we need an extra dose of caution lest we overlook a fundamental difference. I have argued that in Sextus self-bracketing results from dogmatically misinterpreting the intended meaning the φωναί have for the Pyrrhonist; only if taken to be assertions about reality, and not as expressive of the utterer's own mental disposition towards it, do they also apply to themselves and thus bracket themselves along with everything else. As far as our sources can go, the Academic sceptics do not seem to have drawn any such qualification: 'nothing is apprehended', 'nothing is perceived', 'nothing is known' are not disguised first-person reports or avowals, but objective universal conclusions which fall within their scope, and are meant by the Academics to do so to avoid self-contradiction ('I apprehend that nothing at all can be apprehended') or negative meta-dogmatism ('One thing only can be apprehended, that nothing else can'). In this sense, they resemble the dogmatic misinterpretations of the Pyrrhonian φωναί which I have reconstructed in section 2.3 of chapter 14.

Although the ἀκαταληψία doctrine cannot be known to be true on the basis of the demanding Stoic standard of infallible knowledge, this does not mean that it cannot stand in some other acceptable cognitive relation to its proponents: it strikes them as persuasive, and more so than its Stoic opposite (cf. Clitomachus' Carneades in 1124), or is even provisionally accepted as true, although with full awareness of its fallibility (cf. Catulus in 1125). Despite the difference in reflexivity I have highlighted, one might still think that, after all, the Clitomachean attitude towards ἀκαταληψία was very similar to Sextus' towards his φωναί. For to take ἀκαταληψία as a persuasive conclusion and act and speak accordingly, without however committing oneself to its truth, might appear very close to acquiescing in one's present mental affection of ἐπιτοχή and admitting that the opposed reasons appear now equipollent without committing oneself to the claim that they are really so. This would require interpreting Carneades' πιθανόν as a precursor, logically if not historically, of Sextus' φαίνόμενον. To speculate on their actual degree of kinship is a daunting task, since both notions

⁵⁷ Cf. pp. 256–7. This analogy is pointed out by Frede (1984: 270). For a different view cf. Striker 1996: 145–6, 2001: 127.

are liable to a variety of interpretations.⁵⁸ What should be noticed here is that Sextus himself did not treat Carneades' πιθανόν with any sympathy: to say that something is more πιθανόν than something else, or that something is πιθανόν while something else not, is in fact among the things that make the Academics different from, and objectionable to, the Pyrrhonists (PH 1.226–7).⁵⁹ Moreover,

1126 although both the Academics and the Sceptics say that they are persuaded by certain things, in this too the difference between the two philosophies is clear. For 'to be persuaded' (τὸ πείθεσθαι) is used in different senses; not resisting but simply following (ἔπασθαι) without strong inclination or attachment (ἄνευ σφοδρᾶς προσκλίσεως καὶ προσπαθείας) . . . and sometimes assenting to something (συγκατατίθεσθαι τι) by choice and with a sort of sympathy due to strong desire.⁶⁰ (PH 1.229–30)

Immediately afterwards (1.230), Sextus associates Carneades and Clitomachus, and their πιθανόν, with the second, non-Pyrrhonian nuance of πείθεσθαι involving 'strong inclination' (μετὰ προσκλίσεως σφοδρᾶς). We can infer, then, that the Academics' approval of ἀκαταληψία as something πιθανόν would taste unacceptably dogmatic to Sextus' demanding palate.⁶¹ We know what Sextus would instead consider to be a satisfactorily sceptical attitude towards ἀκαταληψία from the section of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* devoted to elucidation of the sceptical expressions. When

⁵⁸ I have already mentioned in chapter 14 that the Pyrrhonian concepts of belief and appearance are open to a variety of interpretations along the main rustic/urbane divide. As for the Academic πιθανόν, we face, to begin with, the well-known problem of deciding whether Carneades himself accepted the πιθανόν as a practical criterion *in propria persona*, or only dialectically, in the framework of his struggle with the Stoics (this is part of the broader debate on whether Arcesilaus and Carneades ever endorsed their sceptical conclusions and suspension of judgement *in propria persona*, on which cf. Ioppolo 1986). For the former view cf. e.g. Frede 1984, Bett 1990, Hankinson 1995: 108–15; for the latter cf. e.g. Coussin 1983, Long and Sedley 1987: vol. 1, 457–60, Burnyeat 1997: 308. On Carneades' πιθανόν cf. also Bett 1989.

⁵⁹ Cf. also Phot. *Bibl.* 212, 169b36–170a11.

⁶⁰ εἰ δὲ καὶ πείθεσθαι τισιν οἱ τε ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας καὶ οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως λέγουσι, πρόδηλος καὶ ἡ κατὰ τοῦτο διαφορά τῶν φιλοσοφῶν. τὸ γὰρ πείθεσθαι λέγεται διαφόρως, τὸ τε μὴ ἀντιτείνειν ἀλλ' ἀπλῶς ἔπασθαι ἄνευ σφοδρᾶς προσκλίσεως καὶ προσπαθείας . . . ἀπαρξὶ δὲ τὸ μετὰ αἰρέσεως καὶ οἰονεῖ συμπαθείας κατὰ τὸ σφόδρα βούλεσθαι συγκατατίθεσθαι τι.

⁶¹ At PH 1.226 Sextus claims that the Academics, unlike the Pyrrhonists, definitely affirm (διαβεβαιοῦνται) that nothing can be apprehended (cf. p. 324nn52–3). It is not clear whether this is a consequence of ignorance of the Academics' claim that 'nothing can be apprehended' is only πιθανόν, or of Sextus' own interpretation of the πιθανόν as ultimately dogmatic. Cf. also PH 1.2–3: Clitomachus, Carneades and other Academics asserted (ἀπεφώνοντο) that things cannot be apprehended, and this is of course sufficient, from a Sextan perspective, to make their position objectionable, even if they do not assert that they *know* that things cannot be apprehended. For Sextus' denial that the Pyrrhonists 'make definite affirmations' (διαβεβαιοῦνται) cf. e.g. T95 (p. 264), T99 (p. 272), T100 (p. 273), T101 (p. 274), T102 (p. 276), T127 (p. 328), PH 1.191 (p. 272n63) and M 8.474 (p. 285).

the Pyrrhonists utter πάντα ἐστὶν ἀκατάληπτα ('All things are non-apprehended'), they implicitly intend all the typical qualifications of their formulae: 'All the <non-evident> things <investigated dogmatically> <which I have inspected> <until now> <appear to me> not to have been apprehended <by me>' (PH 1.200). Sextus explains, in a familiar fashion, that

T127 this is not to affirm definitely (οὐ διαβεβαιουμένου) that the things investigated by the dogmatists are of such a nature as to be inapprehensible, but to announce one's own affection (τὸ ἐαυτοῦ πάθος ἀπαγγέλλοντος), in virtue of which one says 'I suppose that up to now I have not apprehended any of these things because of the equipollence of the opposites'.⁶² (PH 1.200)

Even if we have reasons to doubt the historical accuracy of Sextus' emphasis on the non-sceptical 'intensity' associated with *Carneades'* own use of the πιθανόν,⁶³ it is difficult to dismiss his solution to the problem of how to consistently declare ἀκατάληπτα as a mere rephrasing of Carneades'. Sextus is radically *reshaping* the Academic non-subjective, non-temporal and universal epistemological doctrine (δόγμα) into a different first-person expression of the Pyrrhonist's present mental disposition towards a limited number of non-evident matters which he has considered.⁶⁴ According to Sextus, πάντα ἐστὶν ἀκατάληπτα, like all the other sceptical φωναί, is exempted from its own scope, *pace* Carneades, but this does not doom its proponent to dogmatism, *pace* Antipater. This is possible because the exemption differs in nature from that suggested by Antipater (or conceded, only for the sake of argument, by Sextus in the case of PAP): the mental πάθος expressed by πάντα ἐστὶν ἀκατάληπτα is not reflexive because it is not the kind of unclear thing of which we can inquire whether it is an object of apprehension or not.⁶⁵

⁶² τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν οὐ διαβεβαιουμένου περὶ τοῦ τὰ παρὰ τοῖς δογματικοῖς ζητούμενα φύσεως εἶναι τοιαύτης ὥς εἶναι ἀκατάληπτα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐαυτοῦ πάθος ἀπαγγέλλοντος, καθ' ὃ, φησὶν, ὑπολαμβάνω ὅτι ἄχρι νῦν οὐδὲν κατέλαβον ἐκείνων ἐγὼ διὰ τὴν τῶν ἀντικειμένων ἰσοσθένειαν.

At PH 1.201 Sextus gives a similar, albeit shorter, account for ἀκατάληπτῶ ('I am non-apprehensive') and οὐ καταλαμβάνω ('I do not apprehend').

⁶³ According to Brittain (2001: 89n24, 212n69), Sextus' report is either mistaken or malicious, since the interpretation of the πιθανόν he attacks is the Metrodorean/Philonian one, and not the Clitomachean one (cf. p. 325).

⁶⁴ In PH 1.187–208 Sextus undertakes the same kind of painstaking operation to 'sanitise' various other expressions coming from the previous sceptical tradition which would have been originally implicated in negative meta-dogmatism, such as 'Everything is indeterminate', 'To every argument an equal argument is opposed' (cf. p. 336n89), and perhaps 'Nothing more' itself (cf. chapter 14, section 2.2).

⁶⁵ Compare the different senses in which snow cannot be black and the number two cannot be black.

Sextus' 'third way', then, does not seem to have any obvious antecedent in the pre-Pyrrhonian debates we have sketchily reconstructed in this section. Was it a trademark of Pyrrhonian scepticism from birth?

15.2 SELF-REFUTATION IN PRE-SEXTAN PYRRHONISM

Given the nature and status of our evidence, drawing sharp historical distinctions among the contributions of specific Pyrrhonists towards the formation and development of the neo-Pyrrhonian outlook is a delicate and highly speculative task, even if we content ourselves with the major figures.⁶⁶ As far as the meta-philosophical reflections on the theoretical consistency and practical viability of the Pyrrhonian 'way' (ἀγωγή) are concerned, from the secondary literature one might easily get the impression that one and the same solution was adopted by all Pyrrhonists from the very beginning and defended throughout: the cheerful acceptance of self-refutation, on the one hand, and the adoption of the φαίνόμενον, articulated in the fourfold 'ordinary-life observation' (βιωτική τήρησις),⁶⁷ as a practical criterion of action, on the other. I have argued in chapter 14 that the first half of this solution misrepresents what we find in Sextus; one might be led to suppose that, if my contention is correct, Sextus' different and more refined περιγραφή strategy was the standard Pyrrhonian manoeuvre. Such a supposition, however, would be unwarranted.

Photius' ninth-century AD first-hand *résumé* of Aenesidemus' *Pyrrhonist Discourses* is usually hailed as our single most important source of information on the specific views of the initiator of the neo-Pyrrhonian tradition in the first century BC; however, as Bett observes, 'it might well be wondered whether a late, hostile, and non-philosophical source such as this should be taken seriously' (2000: 192). While recording the emphasis with which Aenesidemus strove to distinguish his own position from that of contemporary Academics, who – in Aenesidemus' view – dogmatically asserted too many things inconsistent with their proclaimed suspension of judgement,⁶⁸ Photius reports Aenesidemus' goal in a way which appears surprisingly liable to analogous objections:

⁶⁶ For attempts to distinguish sharply Aenesidemus' outlook from Sextus' cf. e.g. Woodruff 1988 and Bett 2000; for some perplexities on the results of this enterprise cf. Castagnoli 2002. On Aenesidemus' scepticism, with special focus on Aenesidemus' 'appropriation' of Heraclitus, cf. also Polito 2004 and Schofield 2007.

⁶⁷ Cf. in particular Barnes 1982b: 12–18.

⁶⁸ Cf. p. 324n52. The difference between Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism will soon become a τόπος (in the first half of the second century AD Favorinus describes it as 'old': cf. Gell. NA 9.5.6).

Τ128 The overall aim of the book is to establish definitely (βεβαιῶσαι) that there is no definite means to apprehension (οὐδὲν βέβαιον εἰς κατάληψιν).⁶⁹ (*Bibl.* 212, 169b19–20)

Τ129 But he who philosophises after the fashion of Pyrrho not only is happy in general, but is also wise (σοφός) in that he knows (εἰδέναι) above all that he has not apprehended anything definitely; but even with regard to the things he knows (εἰδεῖν), he is high-minded enough to assent no more to their affirmation than to their denial.⁷⁰ (*Bibl.* 212, 169b26–30)

Although Aenesidemus is not saddled by Photius with the overt self-contradiction that he apprehends that there is nothing at all he has apprehended,⁷¹ both his declared aim, definitely establishing (βεβαιῶσαι) the lack of any definite (βέβαιον) ground for apprehension, and his claims to wisdom (σοφός) and knowledge (εἰδέναι) sound wholly non-Sextan,⁷² and singularly at odds with Aenesidemus' own vocal qualms about the reviled Academics' crypto-dogmatism. Given his obvious biases, Photius might be ironically foisting knowledge claims upon Aenesidemus without any textual warrant, in order to make him look blatantly incoherent and hopelessly silly: I believe that at least the occurrence of βεβαιῶσαι in Τ128 is in fact best explained along these lines. As for Τ129, one might conjecture, with Long and Sedley, that the use of the adjective σοφός and of the verb εἰδέναι (if originally Aenesidemean) not only need not presuppose apprehension and knowledge, but might be 'such a weak one that it does not even entail assent': 'perhaps, then, all that [it] amounts to is that, unlike other philosophers, the Pyrrhonist *is not under the illusion that he has cognition*' (1987: vol. 1, 473).⁷³ On such a reading, one might be tempted to retroject Sextus' conceptual apparatus upon Aenesidemus: the Pyrrhonist's 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' consist in his non-dogmatic acquiescence in the

⁶⁹ ἡ μὲν ὅλη πρόθεσις τοῦ βιβλίου βεβαιῶσαι ὅτι οὐδὲν βέβαιον εἰς κατάληψιν.

⁷⁰ ὁ δὲ κατὰ Πύρρωνα φιλοσοφῶν τὰ τε ἄλλα εὐδαιμονεῖ, καὶ σοφός ἐστι τοῦ μάλιστα εἰδέναι ὅτι οὐδὲν αὐτῷ βεβαίως κατεληπται· ὁ δὲ καὶ εἰδεῖν, οὐδὲν ἄλλον αὐτῶν τῇ καταφάσει ἢ τῇ ἀποφάσει γενναῖός ἐστι συγκατατίθεσθαι.

⁷¹ Cf. Arcesilaus' caution in Τ121 on p. 320. ⁷² Cf. p. 327n61.

⁷³ Long and Sedley's further suggestion that this use is analogous to the use of *sciat* at Cic. *Luc.* 148 (Τ125 on p. 321) does not appear completely appropriate, since firm assent and belief, albeit not apprehension, seem to be involved there. According to Burnyeat, instead, 'this Pyrrhonist version of Socratic ignorance (the allusion seems guaranteed by the word σοφός) does look paradoxical. A Pyrrhonist is one who says, "I know I know nothing and I do not believe what I know". But Pyrrhonists also make a point of refuting themselves . . . relish self-refutation as the means of relief from dogma. Accordingly, rather than follow Long and Sedley . . . I would accept it as a deliberate ploy' (1997: 296n51). However, as far as I know, nowhere do the Pyrrhonists adopt *self-contradictory* claims like 'I know I know nothing'.

passive and involuntary mental impression of having been unable to apprehend anything so far.⁷⁴ This might seem to be precluded by the surprising specification that he does not assent to what he 'knows' either: Sextus' Pyrrhonist does assent, non-dogmatically, to his own affections (i.e. again, merely acquiesces in them), including the intellectual one of ἀκαταληψία (cf. Τ92 on p. 256). As I have remarked on p. 257n20, however, this is a non-standard use of 'assent', and Sextus would agree with Photius' Aenesidemus that the Pyrrhonist does not give his (dogmatic) assent to his own present affections, since these are not the kind of things that can be the object of such an assent (cf. also p. 334). Alternatively, we might suppose that Photius' report is confused here, and Aenesidemus' original point was that the Pyrrhonist does not assent to the dogmatic affirmations and denials which concern the matters of fact underlying his 'known' πάθος (e.g. he 'knows', i.e. acquiesces in, his own present πάθος of ἀκαταληψία, but, unlike the Academics, he does not assent to the doctrine of ἀκαταληψία, that things are in fact inapprehensible, since it concerns 'unclear external reality' and represents thereby negative meta-dogmatism).

The only clearly recognisable move reported by Photius in his summary of the *Pyrrhonist Discourses* is Aenesidemus' emphasis on the reflexivity of the sceptical expression 'Nothing is determined':

Τ130 The Pyrrhonist determines absolutely nothing, and not even this very thing, that nothing is determined (οὐδὲν ὁ Πυρρώνιος ὀρίζει, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐδὲν διορίζεται); but we express ourselves in this way, he says, not having any means to blurt out (ἐκκλήσωμεν) the thought.⁷⁵ (*Bibl.* 212, 170a11–14)

The Pyrrhonist's utterance of 'Nothing is determined' might give the impression that he is trying, incoherently, to put forward its propositional content as something he has determined to be objectively true, i.e. that he is trying to make an assertion.⁷⁶ Aenesidemus clarifies that this impression would be wrong, and that it is not the Pyrrhonist's fault if language does not offer any suitable alternative way to express his actual thought, some unmistakably non-assertoric mode of speech.⁷⁷ Is this the

⁷⁴ Cf. p. 334n85.

⁷⁵ οὐδὲν ὁ Πυρρώνιος ὀρίζει, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐδὲν διορίζεται· ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔχοντες, φησίν, ὅπως τὸ νοούμενον ἐκκλήσωμεν, οὕτω φράζομεν.

⁷⁶ According to Sextus (*PH* 1.197), 'determining we think to be not simply saying something but making an utterance about an unclear matter with assent' (ὀρίζειν εἶναι νομίζομεν οὐχὶ τὸ ἀπλῶς λέγειν τι, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρᾶγμα ἄδηλον προφέρεισθαι μετὰ συγκαταθέσεως).

⁷⁷ Could not the Pyrrhonist formulate his thought into the following formula: 'Nothing is determined, not even this very thing'? This would not solve the problem, but only move it one step further:

same as an admission that the Pyrrhonist's utterances of 'Nothing is determined' bracket themselves? Not precisely: not only are the vocabulary and similes for self-elimination absent from T130, but such an admission would undermine Aenesidemus' declared aim. Bracketing presupposes that what is bracketed has previously been written: the self-bracketing of 'Nothing is determined' would be possible only if this formula were purportedly put forward in the first place as a dogmatic truth, but Aenesidemus' point is exactly the opposite, that, despite the intrinsic ambiguity of our ordinary language, the Pyrrhonist does not intend to 'determine' that 'Nothing is determined' when he utters this characteristic expression.

We can best appreciate this subtle difference by comparison with the following account by Diogenes Laertius (third century AD):

T131 [The Sceptics would go] so far as to utter and set out in detail the [doctrines] of others, without determining anything <themselves>, not even this very thing. Thus, they even did away with (ἀνῆρουν) the non-determining, when saying, for example, 'We determine nothing', since otherwise they would have determined <something>.⁷⁸ (9.74)

The Pyrrhonists exercise their sceptical activity by presenting, discussing and setting in opposition various dogmatic doctrines, without assenting to any of them *in propria persona*; in a nutshell, they determine nothing. But, Diogenes reports, they do not determine their non-determining either. Here a first difference emerges: according to Photius' T130, what the Pyrrhonist does not determine is something about the world, that nothing is determined, and not something *about himself*, that he does not determine anything. From this point of view Diogenes' account seems to match, instead, Sextus': at PH 1.197 we read that 'perhaps it will be found that the Sceptic determines nothing, not even "I determine nothing" itself'.⁷⁹ But then Diogenes, unlike Photius and Sextus, adds that the Sceptics even *eliminate* (ἀνῆρουν) their non-determining, since otherwise they would be determining something. In chapter 14 we came across the verb ἀναιρεῖν

one could still protest that by his utterance the Pyrrhonist is incoherently trying to determine that 'Nothing is determined, not even this very thing'. For explanation of the meaning of ἐκκαλῆσωμεν and a different interpretation of the passage cf. Bett 2000: 195n12. For an analogous logical pattern cf. Burnyeat's reconstruction of Antipater's anti-Academic strategy (pp. 322–3).

We have seen that Sextus too admits that the declarative form of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον can be a source of misunderstanding (PH 1.191) and tries to clarify the non-assertoric character of the sceptical language through a series of devices (cf. chapter 14, section 2 (especially p. 265) and p. 348n129).

⁷⁸ ἕως δὲ τοῦ προφέρεισθαι τὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ διηγείσθαι μηδὲν ὀρίζοντες, μηδ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο. ὥστε καὶ τὸ μὴ ὀρίζειν ἀνῆρουν, λέγοντες οἷον οὐδὲν ὀρίζομεν, ἔπει ὥριζον ἂν.

⁷⁹ οὕτω γὰρ οὐδὲν ὀρίζων ὁ σκεπτικὸς τάχα εὐρεθήσεται, οὐδὲ αὐτὸ τὸ οὐδὲν ὀρίζω. *Contra* Bett 2000: 198–9n18.

at PH 1.206 (T101, p. 274) and M 8.480 (T110, p. 290), where it denoted that form of self-elimination to which the sceptical expressions and arguments would be exposed as soon as advanced (or intended) with a certain dogmatic frame of mind. In Diogenes ἀναιρεῖν appears to have the same import: that the Sceptics eliminate 'We determine nothing' seems to mean that they deny any determinateness to it and give up asserting it as a true maxim. The same happens in the case of οὐδὲν μᾶλλον:

T132 But the Sceptics even eliminate (ἀναιροῦσι) the expression itself 'Nothing more'; for, as providence is no more than is not, so too 'Nothing more' is no more than is not.⁸⁰ (9.76)

But while such 'eliminating', 'denying' or 'giving up' make perfect sense in Sextus, where the self-elimination of the φωναί occurs in a precise dialectical framework that makes it possible (and necessary), in Diogenes they appear more puzzling, since there is no trace of such framework. I have argued that in Sextus οὐδὲν μᾶλλον eliminates itself, by self-application, only when misinterpreted as a true maxim about reality, i.e. only when hypothetically made an object of dogmatic belief; in Diogenes this key qualification is missing.

Later in his *Life of Pyrrho* Diogenes explains why the Pyrrhonists, when uttering 'I determine nothing', are not dogmatizing.⁸¹

T133 Regarding the expression 'I determine nothing' and the like, we say them, but not in a dogmatic way. For they are not like saying 'The cosmos is spherical'. For the latter is unclear (ἄδηλον), whereas the former are confessions (ἐξομολογήσεις). So (οὖν), when we say 'We determine nothing' we are not determining this very thing either.⁸² (9.103–4)

The Pyrrhonist is not determining something when he claims 'I determine nothing' because this, like all the other φωναί, is only a *confession* (ἐξομολογήσεις) of his own present inner mental disposition and not an assertion about something unclear; in a similar vein, at 9.74 we are informed that by 'I determine nothing' (and all the other φωναί) the Pyrrhonists 'indicate their affection of equilibrium (τὸ τῆς ἀρρεψίας πάθος)'.⁸³ Such

⁸⁰ ἀναιροῦσι δ' οἱ σκεπτικοὶ καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον φωνήν· ὥς γὰρ οὐ μᾶλλον ἔστι πρόνοια ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν, οὕτω καὶ τὸ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον οὐ μᾶλλον ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν.

⁸¹ The dogmatic accusation that the utterance of the φωναί gives away the Sceptic's hidden dogmatism is presented, more explicitly than in Sextus, at 9.102.

⁸² περὶ δὲ τῆς οὐδὲν ὀρίζω φωνῆς καὶ τῶν ὁμοίων λέγομεν ὡς οὐ δογματῶν· οὐ γὰρ εἰσιν ὁμοια τῷ λέγειν ὅτι σφαιροειδὴς ἔστιν ὁ κόσμος. ἀλλὰ γὰρ τὸ μὲν ἀδηλον, αἱ δ' ἐξομολογήσεις εἰσὶ. ἐν ᾧ οὖν λέγομεν μηδὲν ὀρίζειν, οὐδ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο ὀρίζομεν.

⁸³ According to Sextus (PH 1.190), 'by "equilibrium" <we mean> assent to neither side' (ἀρρεψίαν δὲ τὴν πρὸς μηδέτερον συγκατάθεσιν).

first-person announcement does not count as determining something, since – as Sextus teaches us – to determine is to give assent to some unclear matter and assert it,⁸⁴ and one's own πάθη are not among τὰ ἄδηλα (PH 1.197). Diogenes' account of the non-assertoric nature of the φωναί in TI33 is thus virtually identical to Sextus'. By contrast, the difference from Photius' TI30 becomes now clearer: in Photius the reason why 'Nothing is determined' remains non-determined by the Pyrrhonist is that it is itself a non-evident matter of fact on which he thereby suspends judgement, and not that it is a first-person confession which is not even the *kind* of thing which could count as 'determined'.⁸⁵

We have found Diogenes also claiming, in TI31, that the Sceptics eliminate the formula 'I determine nothing' when they say it. That seems to presuppose that in the first place this φωνή is advanced as something 'determined', i.e. is an assertion about some unclear state of affairs put forward with assent by the Sceptic; otherwise there would be, again, no determinateness to cancel.⁸⁶ The same holds, more explicitly, for the self-application of 'Nothing more' in TI32. Diogenes' various accounts are therefore inconsistent, because they make of οὐδὲν ὀρίζω and οὐδὲν μᾶλλον at the same time non-dogmatic expressions of mental affections (TI33), à la Sextus, and purported negative dogmatic claims about ἄδηλα which eliminate themselves together with them (TI31 and TI32). The same two dissonant accounts appear in Sextus, but I have argued that there is no real

⁸⁴ Cf. p. 331n76.

⁸⁵ Diogenes Laertius (9.103) reports that according to the Pyrrhonists 'we know (γινώσκωμεν) only our affections (πάθη) about non-evident things', clearly including our πάθη of ἀρρησία and ἐποχή. This use of γινώσκω, which has a strong 'Cyrenaicising' flavour (cf. e.g. D.L. 2.92, S.E. M 7.190–9, Plut. *Colot.* 1120C–F), is reminiscent of the use of εἰδέναι in Photius' TI29 and is fully compatible with what Sextus says in PH 1.215:

φασὶ δὲ τινες ὅτι ἡ Κυρηναϊκὴ ἀγωγὴ ἢ αὐτὴ ἐστὶ τῇ σκέψει, ἐπειδὴ κάκεινη τὰ πάθη μόνον φησὶ καταλαμβάνεσθαι. . . ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐπέχομεν ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ περὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένων, οἱ δὲ Κυρηναϊκοὶ ἀποφαίνονται φύσιν αὐτὰ ἔχειν ἀκατάληπτον.

Some say that the Cyrenaic persuasion is identical with scepticism, since it too says that only the affections are apprehended. . . We [*sc.* the Pyrrhonists] suspend judgement on external objects as regards their essence, whereas the Cyrenaics assert that they have an inapprehensible nature.

According to both Sextus and Diogenes, the Pyrrhonist, like the Cyrenaic, admits that he knows only his own affections; unlike the Cyrenaic, however, he does not believe that everything else is unknowable (i.e. that he *can* know *only* his own affections), but suspends judgement on the issue and therefore does not fall into negative meta-dogmatism (*pace* Fine 2000: 98n57). On the formula ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ cf. Brunschwig 1994b; on Cyrenaic epistemology cf. Tsouna 1998.

⁸⁶ Unless we interpret the occurrence of ἀναίρειν in TI31 more loosely than in the parallel Sextan passages which we analysed in chapter 14: the Sceptics *deny* their own non-determining (rather than eliminate it) in the plain sense that they add to their claim 'We determine nothing' the immediate qualification 'not even this very thing, of course', exactly as explained in the first half of TI31.

inconsistency there: the first one reveals the mature Pyrrhonist's actual attitude towards his utterances, the second one is part of a refined dialectical manoeuvre Sextus employs against certain stubborn dogmatic accusations. But in Diogenes there is no trace of the complex framework I have reconstructed in Sextus, and thus the inconsistency which I have highlighted above cannot be explained away analogously.

But there is another, more manifest difference between Diogenes' and Sextus' accounts of the self-elimination of the sceptical φωναί:

TI34 Even this argument (λόγος)⁸⁷ [*sc.* that to every argument an equipollent argument is opposed] has an opposing argument, so that this very argument, after it has eliminated (ἀνελεῖν) the others, incurring self-reversal, is destroyed (ὕψ' ἑαυτοῦ περιτραπείς ἀπόλλυται), just like purgatives which first purge the foreign matter and then are themselves purged and destroyed.⁸⁸ (D.L. 9.76)

Here Diogenes glosses the self-elimination of the sceptical expression παντὶ λόγῳ through the verb περιτρέπειν, whereas Sextus consistently uses (συμ)περιγράφειν, as I have shown in chapter 14. In that chapter I have also argued that the Pyrrhonists never accept the reversal charges levelled by their adversaries and that the purgatives simile is not in fact a simile for reversal; are these conclusions to be revised in light of Diogenes' testimony? Suppose someone asserts that

(1) 'To every λόγος an equipollent λόγος is opposed',

in a straightforward dogmatic, non-Pyrrhonian fashion; certainly he will not help admitting that the opposed λόγος concluding that

(2) 'Some λόγος has no equipollent λόγος opposed to it'

must be equipollent, i.e. that the reasons for believing (2) are as strong (or weak) as those for believing (1). But this could never lead him to assent to (2) and reject (1), which is the characteristic mark of the περιτροπή that Sextan Pyrrhonists want to eschew; on the contrary, it will presumably

⁸⁷ For the broad meaning of λόγος in the sceptical expression παντὶ λόγῳ cf. S.E. PH 1.202: 'not necessarily that formed of premisses and conclusion, but that establishing <something unclear> in whatever way'.

⁸⁸ καὶ αὐτῷ δὲ τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ λόγος ἀντίκειται, ὡς καὶ οὗτος μετὰ τὸ ἀνελεῖν τοὺς ἄλλους ὕψ' ἑαυτοῦ περιτραπείς ἀπόλλυται, κατ' ἴσον τοῖς καθαρτικοῖς, ἃ τὴν ὕλην προεκκρίναντα καὶ αὐτὰ ὑπεκκρίνεται καὶ ἐξαπόλλυται. For the reading ὡς καὶ οὗτος which I adopt here cf. Goulet-Cazé 1999: 113n4; the MSS have ὅς καὶ οὗτος, emended to ὅς καὶ αὐτός in Hübner's, Long's and Marcovich's editions. On the standard emendation, it would be the opposing λόγος ('not to every λόγος an equipollent λόγος is opposed') that destroys itself, whereas it is clearly the sceptical λόγος the one that is supposed to incur self-elimination (cf. below).

induce suspension of judgement as to whether (1) or (2).⁸⁹ Dogmatic assent to (1) is automatically subject to self-bracketing, a self-elimination without residues from the set of the proponent's beliefs.⁹⁰ Yet, there is a point of view from which such a logical movement could also be described as a *περιτροπή*, as in Diogenes' account in *TI*34: even if the self-application of (1) cannot force the Sceptic into admitting the definite truth of (2), it commits him to the equipollence of (1) and (2); but then, since the Sceptic has already subscribed to (1), he has now no reason to refuse to concede *also* the opposite thesis (2).⁹¹ Notice, however, that Diogenes Laertius' account, unlike the Sextan parallels in *PH* and like that in *M* 8, posits a temporal

⁸⁹ According to Diogenes Laertius (9.76), 'the expression "To every argument" induces suspension of judgement as well: for when, on the one hand, the facts disagree and, on the other, the arguments are equally strong the ignorance of the truth results' (παντί λόγῳ φωνῇ καὶ αὐτῇ συναγεῖ τὴν ἐποχὴν· τῶν μὲν γὰρ πραγμάτων διαφωνούντων τῶν δὲ λόγων ἰσοσθενούντων ἀγνοασία τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπακολουθεῖ). Sextus' analysis (*PH* 1.203) is similar, but more precise in making the crucial point explicit that the opposite arguments are 'arguments establishing something dogmatically': 'Therefore, whenever I say "To every argument an equal argument is opposed" I am implicitly saying "To every argument I have investigated which establishes something dogmatically, another argument which establishes something dogmatically appears to me to be opposed, equal to it in credibility and lack of credibility"' (ὅταν οὖν εἴπω παντί λόγῳ λόγος ἴσος ἀντίκειται, δυνάμει τοῦτο φημι παντί τῷ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ζητούμενῳ λόγῳ, ὅς κατασκευάζει τι δογματικῶς, ἕτερος λόγος κατασκευάζων τι δογματικῶς, ἴσος αὐτῷ κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν, ἀντικείμενον φαίνεται μοι).

The idea that something like the παντί λόγῳ formula is reflexive might go as far back as Protagoras himself. According to Seneca (*Mor.* 88.43), 'Protagoras says that on every matter it is possible to argue on both sides with equal strength, and also on this very thing, whether every matter can be argued on both sides' (*Protagoras ait de omni re in utramque partem disputari posse ex aequo et de hac ipsa, an omnis res in utramque partem disputabilis sit*). Although this testimony is not necessarily reliable from a historical point of view, it is interesting to compare this alleged Protagorean acceptance of reflexivity with the difficulties that the reflexivity of the Measure Doctrine, taken for granted by Plato, causes in Plato's *Theaetetus* (cf. part 1, chapter 4, section 2).

⁹⁰ A qualification is in order here. If someone dogmatically asserts παντί λόγῳ as a true maxim he ought to be ready to admit that παντί λόγῳ is more credible than its opposite, that he takes the reasons for believing παντί λόγῳ to be stronger than those for believing not-παντί λόγῳ. But this commits him to admitting that there is at least one λόγος having no opposed equipollent λόγος (παντί λόγῳ itself), i.e. to admitting the contradictory of his initial proposal by reversal. This argument, however, is not the one based on reflexivity at stake in Diogenes' *TI*34.

⁹¹ Again, however, the dialectical framework which is fundamental for Sextan περιγραφή as I have reconstructed it is absent from Diogenes' *TI*34. Let us conjecture how Sextus' περιγραφή argument would run if applied to παντί λόγῳ: 'When we utter παντί λόγῳ we are not asserting the truth of a dogmatic maxim establishing that every argument has an objectively equipollent argument opposed to it, but we are just expressing our present πάθος of suspension of judgement, confessing that for any dogmatic argument we have examined so far there is an opposed dogmatic argument that at present appears to us equally credible. Therefore you cannot say that our utterance is a clue to disguised dogmatism; nor can you argue that because of it we are bound to admit, by περιτροπή, that there is actually some dogmatic argument that we find more persuasive than its opposite. But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that we posited παντί λόγῳ dogmatically – what we actually do not do; not even so would we be dogmatising. If interpreted as a dogmatic maxim, παντί λόγῳ is self-referring, says that it itself, like any other dogmatic λόγος, has in reality an equipollent opposite, and thus brackets itself, expunging itself from the set of the beliefs of its proponent, who thus ends up suspending judgement concerning its truth.'

gap between the elimination of the other λόγοι and the self-application and self-elimination of παντί λόγῳ itself. Since, as I argued in chapter 14, section 3.6, the existence of such a temporal gap is neither necessary for the Pyrrhonists' argument nor logically justified, this might be evidence that Diogenes Laertius' source for the purgatives simile is earlier than Sextus and closer to Sextus' own source for *M* 7–8.⁹²

So far I have referred, generically, to 'Diogenes' account', without trying to specify what phase of Pyrrhonism it may reflect. Barnes has convincingly argued against the possibility of identifying Diogenes' sources for the 'philosophical part' of the life of Pyrrho in book 9: although Diogenes mentions no less than ten possible Pyrrhonian sources, we cannot decide which of them he is directly copying or indirectly drawing on.⁹³ Since Diogenes does not attribute the views and arguments we have just analysed to any specific Pyrrhonist, we must give up determining positively who was responsible for them. The subtle but substantial differences I have identified above might suggest, if anything, the conjectural conclusion that Sextus was not Diogenes' source for the parallel passages we have just inspected.⁹⁴

The purgatives simile is also recorded in Aristocles' discussion and criticism of Pyrrhonism preserved in Eusebius of Caesarea, which suggests its early currency in the neo-Pyrrhonist tradition, perhaps as early as Aenesidemus himself.⁹⁵ The Pyrrhonists' use of the simile attracted Aristocles' harsh criticism:

*TI*35 For it is also absolutely silly when they [*sc.* the Pyrrhonists] say that just as purgative drugs purge out themselves too together with the excrements, in the same way also the argument which maintains that all things are unclear eliminates (ἀναρπεί) itself too together with the other things. For if it refuted itself (αὐτὸν ἐλέγχῃ), those who use it would be talking nonsense. Then

⁹² Cf. p. 294n134.

⁹³ Barnes 1992: 4279–90. For the different view that Aenesidemus himself (and his particular brand of Pyrrhonism) was a major source for Diogenes Laertius cf. Bett 2000: 207–11.

⁹⁴ Barnes (1992: 4263–79) has shown that Sextus was not Diogenes' source for the ten modes, the five modes and 9.90–101.

⁹⁵ Aenesidemus is the most recent Pyrrhonist whom Aristocles mentions, and *PE* 14.18.29 ('a certain Aenesidemus began to revive this nonsense [*sc.* Pyrrhonism] yesterday or the day before') seems to indicate that his 'revival of Pyrrhonism was not too long before Aristocles' reply' (Chiesara 2001: 135). Moreover, Aristocles does not seem to be acquainted with any of the later Pyrrhonists known to us (e.g. Agrippa, Theodosius, Menodotus, Sextus Empiricus). Chiesara argues that the overall evidence 'strongly supports the hypothesis that Aenesidemus, or a Pyrrhonian epitomator very close to him, was Aristocles' source for most of his chapter on the Pyrrhonians' (2001: 136), including the paragraphs which I shall examine. Aristocles' dates are uncertain and much debated (scholarly proposals have covered a span of three centuries, from the first century BC to the second century AD); for his chronology with reference to Aenesidemus' cf. Chiesara 2001, xiv–xxiv. For discussion of Aristocles' arguments against Pyrrhonism cf. Warren 2000.

it would be better for them to keep quiet and not to open their mouth at all. But indeed the purgative drug and their argument have no similarity at all. For the drug is purged and does not remain in the body, whereas the argument must be in the souls, and remain the same and be always trusted; for this would be the only thing that makes people refrain from assenting.⁹⁶ (Aristoc. *ap. Eus. PE* 14.18.21–2)

What kind of 'self-refutation' do the Pyrrhonists accept here?⁹⁷ The self-elimination of the sceptical λόγος which maintains that 'All things are unclear' could not be, even for Aristocles, a reversal into its own contradictory, let alone a self-falsification. That the argument⁹⁸ eliminates itself must mean that it denounces the unclearness (and not the falsehood) of itself too and therefore, like everything else, does not merit our assent and belief. Although this does not mean that the contradictory of its conclusion, 'Something is clear', is thereby positively established, Aristocles thinks this is enough for speaking of 'self-refutation', and levelling his charge of silliness: if the Pyrrhonist admits that his own argument does not command assent, because it is as unclear as everything else, why does he still waste his (and our) time propounding it?⁹⁹ Whom does he hope to persuade?

Aristocles' objection appears to have some momentum, but much of its apparent force fades away if we assess and tackle it in light of the distinctive Pyrrhonian attitude towards language and argument elaborated in Sextus. The speech act of assertion is intimately linked to belief, and belief to truth: when someone asserts something, most often that can be taken to indicate that he believes what he asserts, i.e. that he considers it to be true (or at least that he is committing himself to the truth of the proposition asserted).¹⁰⁰ Similarly, when someone propounds an argument, in normal circumstances we can take him to believe at least in the truth of its conclusion, of which he hopes to persuade us as well. According to Aristocles, by propounding an argument the soundness of which he himself must admit is unclear, in virtue of the conclusion of the argument itself,

⁹⁶ ἐκεῖνο μὲν γὰρ καὶ παντάπασιν ἐστὶν ἡλίθιον, ἐπειδὴν λέγωσιν, ὅτι καθάπερ τὰ καθαρτικά φάρμακα συνεκκρίνει μετὰ τῶν περιττωμάτων καὶ ἑαυτά, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ὁ πάντα ἀξίων εἶναι λόγος ὁδηλα μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἀναρεῖ καὶ ἑαυτὸν. εἰ γὰρ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ἐλέγχοι, ληροῖεν ἂν οἱ χρώμενοι τούτῳ. βέλτιον οὖν ἡσυχίαν ἔχειν αὐτοὺς καὶ μηδὲ τὸ στόμα διαίρειν. ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ' ὅμοιον ἔχει τι τὸ καθαρτικὸν φάρμακον καὶ ὁ τούτων λόγος. τὸ μὲν γὰρ φάρμακον ἐκκρίνεται κἀν τοῖς σώμασιν οὐχ ὑπομένει, τὸν μὲντοι λόγον ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑπάρχειν δεῖ τὸν αὐτὸν δοῦναι καὶ πιστευόμενον αἰεὶ· μόνος γὰρ οὗτος εἴη ἂν ὁ ποιῶν ἀσυγκαταθέτους.

⁹⁷ I suggest that ἐλέγχειν is here the Aristotelising way in which the Peripatetic Aristocles himself chooses to reword his Pyrrhonian source's ἀναρεῖν.

⁹⁸ Or the *statement* that everything is unclear (notice the usual indeterminacy of the term λόγος).

⁹⁹ Cf. Aristoc. *ap. Eus. PE* 14.18.12. ¹⁰⁰ Cf. e.g. Searle 1979: 12.

the Sceptic would then be violating a basic conversational rule of rational communication. As Sextus taught us, however, these considerations are not supposed to suit the Pyrrhonist's own language of non-assertion: a coherent Pyrrhonist can admit that the objective soundness of the argument he is presenting is something unclear to him and at the same time declare that at the moment he is finding that argument persuasive to a certain degree, equal to that of the opposite one (cf. chapter 14, section 3.3).

One might protest that, even in the presence of such a rejoinder and even granting that it is conceptually viable and not a shallow verbal trick,¹⁰¹ Aristocles could easily revise his charge: 'perhaps *you* have no interest in truth and are content with blurting out your present feelings about something you admit to be obscure even for yourself, but certainly *I* am not interested in the chronicles of your bizarre mental life!' Here the second part of Sextus' strategy in defence of the Pyrrhonist's distinctive use of argument would come into play, along the lines I have sketched for the arguments against proof in section 3.7 of chapter 14. Perhaps the dogmatist is not interested in the effects the Pyrrhonist's argument had on the Pyrrhonist's mind, but certainly the Pyrrhonist, always an investigator, is curious to know what therapeutic effect that argument has on the dogmatist. Does *he* judge the argument sound? If not, what faults has he detected in it? And if the dogmatist cannot decide and explain, on the basis of his own high standards of logical soundness, what is wrong with the Pyrrhonist's argument, how can he coherently reject it and say he is not persuaded in the least and, at the same time, continue trusting those standards? If the argument concluding that everything is unclear purges itself too along with everything else, then it is the dogmatist who must be talking nonsense, if that argument relies on premisses and inferences he is unable to refute directly.

Aristocles' final attack on the purgative simile looks more pointed. If the Pyrrhonist's λόγος is expelled from the mind, how can it retain its power to affect it in the future?¹⁰² Although Aristocles' contention that there is no analogy at all with purgatives appears excessive, undeniably there is some

¹⁰¹ Cf. p. 273n69.

¹⁰² For a very similar criticism cf. Plut. *Cohib. Ira* 453D8–E2: 'And one of those beautiful sayings of Musonius which I remember is, Sulla, that those who wish to be safe and sound must live their whole life under treatment. For, I think, when we administer the cure reason should not be removed along (συνεκφέρεσθαι) with the disease, as it happens with hellebore, but remaining in the soul it should keep watch over our judgements and make them secure. For its power does not resemble drugs but healthy food' (καὶ μὴν ὦν γε μεμνήμεθα Μουσωνίου καλῶν ἐν ἐστίν, ὦ Σύλλα, τὸ δεῖν αἰεὶ θεραπευομένους βιοῦν τοὺς σῶζεσθαι μέλλοντας. οὐ γὰρ ὡς ἐλλέβορον, οἶμαι, δεῖ θεραπεύσαντα συνεκφέρεσθαι τῷ νοσήματι τὸν λόγον, ἀλλ' ἐμμένοντα τῇ ψυχῇ συνέχειν τὰς κρίσεις καὶ φυλάσσειν. φαρμάκοις γὰρ οὐκ ἔοικεν ἀλλὰ σιτίοις ὑγιεινοῖς ἡ δύναμις αὐτοῦ).

prima facie dissimilarity here: the Pyrrhonist's arguments must not only purge the mind of its current noxious beliefs (including the belief in the soundness and demonstrativeness of those very arguments), but also preside over it in such a stable way that it will not revert to unhealthy belief-forming in the future. Unlike indigestion and constipation, the dogmatist might protest, assent and belief are natural states of the human mind to which it is bound to return in the absence of strong and constant counteracting influence.¹⁰³

I believe that a refined Pyrrhonist *à la* Sextus would not be helpless before such a line of criticism. To begin with, he may be willing to admit that of course his simile is not perfect, since no simile should be expected to be perfect: a felicitous simile can be insightful also in virtue of what it fails to capture.¹⁰⁴ Second, the Pyrrhonist might explain that the sceptical arguments do remain in the mind, in a way: although they are no longer accepted as sound, they are not rejected as unsound either, since their soundness is now one of the unclear objective matters of fact on which the mature Pyrrhonist suspends his judgement. Those arguments still retain some subjective degree of persuasiveness, equal to that of the opposite arguments; what has been purged is any doxastic commitment to them. Third, he might explain that the complete purge of beliefs from the mind also amounts to a radical *restructuring* of the mind itself. For a mind is not a mere 'belief-container' (as the dogmatists will certainly be glad to accept); it is, in a sense, the structured totality of its beliefs (and, of course, many other attitudes and dispositions) at any given time (unlike a digestive apparatus, which is not the structured totality of its contents). Among the beliefs which have been bracketed by the Pyrrhonist's argument, there are also all those, most general and fundamental, in the reliability of our senses and our standards of sound reasoning as criteria for rational assent and means to knowledge of reality, i.e. those beliefs which are the (normally unchallenged) background for any belief-forming. Therefore, the Pyrrhonist's mind should have become impermeable to belief, at least in the measure in which belief is supposed to answer to rational standards and procedures and until some dogmatic commitment to such standards and procedures is somehow restored.¹⁰⁵ Fourth, the Pyrrhonist can be ready to accept that the poisonous habit of assenting is so entrenched in

¹⁰³ For an analogous point cf. Hume's famous remarks on Pyrrhonism in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 12.128.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. p. 307n163.

¹⁰⁵ How this restoration could ever occur is difficult to see (the process would appear to require some mysterious form of 'epistemic bootstrapping').

our lives that one will continuously need to rehearse one's arguments, and devise other arguments to the same effect, to fortify one's newly-acquired mental health and to avoid relapsing into the misery of dogmatism. This is compatible with Sextus' depiction of the Pyrrhonist as a life-long inquirer (ζητητικός):¹⁰⁶ just as a dose of purgatives is not likely to be a remedy for life, the sceptical drugs might well require frequent boosters.

In chapter 5 of the eighth book of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* (*Miscellanies*) we find criticism of the Pyrrhonist's self-elimination manoeuvre from a different angle. According to Clement, the self-elimination will occur *before* (and not at the same time as, or after) any other presumed effect can occur:

1136 if suspension of judgement says that nothing is certain (βέβαιον), it is clear that, beginning with itself, it will first invalidate itself (πρῶτον ἀκυρώσει ἑαυτήν) . . . If it says that nothing is true, it is also clear that it will be the first not to speak truly . . . And in general, if it is true, it will make a beginning with itself, and will not be suspension of anything else but itself first . . . If we must be persuaded to suspend judgement about everything, we will first suspend our judgement about suspension itself, whether we must trust it or not.¹⁰⁷ (*Strom.* 8.5.15)

Clement treats ἐποχή, quite peculiarly, as equivalent to the claim that 'nothing is certain' or 'nothing is true'; it is thus easy to understand how he can take it, in a wholly non-Sextan fashion, to be reflexive. However, he does not provide any support for his contention concerning the priority of the self-application of ἐποχή, which is clearly polemically aimed at the Pyrrhonists' claims that their formulae and arguments eliminate themselves *after* eliminating the dogmatic doctrines which they target, or *together with* them (cf. section 3.6 of chapter 14). In the same chapter Clement also objects that if someone apprehends and says that he suspends judgement, he is clearly not suspending judgement about everything: but Sextus would reply that the Pyrrhonist's awareness and expression of his current mental state of ἐποχή are not the same as the dogmatic assent to, and assertion of, some unclear matter of fact, and therefore do not impair his ἐποχή in the least.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *PH* 1.3, 1.7; D.L. 9.69. The Pyrrhonist is not called (or depicted as) ζητητικός in Aristocles and Photius.

¹⁰⁷ εἰ φησιν ἡ ἐποχή βέβαιον εἶναι μηδέν, δῆλον ὅτι ἀφ' ἑαυτῆς ἀρξαμένη πρῶτον ἀκυρώσει ἑαυτήν . . . μηδέν εἶναι ἀληθές λέγουσα, καὶ δῆλον ὅτι οὐδ' αὐτὴ πρότερον ἀληθεύσει . . . καὶ ὅλως εἰ ἔστιν ἀληθές, ἀφ' ἑαυτῆς ποιήσεται τὴν ἀρχήν, οὐκ ἄλλου τινὸς οὕσα ἐποχή, ἀλλ' ἑαυτῆς πρῶτον . . . εἰ δὲ πειθόμενον αὐτοῖς περὶ πάντων ἐπέχειν, περὶ αὐτῆς πρότερον τῆς ἐποχῆς ἐφέξομεν, εἴτε πειστέον αὐτῇ εἴτε καὶ μή.

¹⁰⁸ Witt's (1937: 35–6) claim that Clement's criticism in this passage (and 8.5 more generally) represents Antiochus' standpoint (through the possible mediating influence of Aristocles), as attested by Cic.

Whether all the kinds of reply I have outlined in defence of the Pyrrhonian stance would have been available to the historical targets of Aristocles' and Clement's censure is questionable, and so much more so if we identify these targets with early Pyrrhonists, and possibly Aenesidemus himself.¹⁰⁹ For it is plausible to suppose that most defences of the coherence of Pyrrhonism we can find in (or plausibly extrapolate from) Sextus Empiricus first originated in response to some relevant dogmatic charges, and were subsequently revised, developed and refined over many decades. Of course, this is not to deny that Aenesidemus, probably an Academy renegade himself,¹¹⁰ could have taken into some account from the very beginning the lessons of those Hellenistic debates which I have reconstructed above in the first section of this chapter. For this very reason, I believe that the standard hypothesis that the purgatives simile originated with neo-Pyrrhonism,¹¹¹ and most likely with Aenesidemus himself,¹¹² is unwarranted. Equally unwarranted seems to be the suggestion that the purgatives simile must have originated within some Hellenistic medical school:¹¹³ that simile does not suggest or require any specific medical expertise, any more than the fire simile requires an expertise in combustibles or the ladder simile in siege tactics. We have learnt in section 3.6 of chapter 14 that Carneades was keen on vivid similes for inconsistency (although not for self-refutation), and in section 1 of this chapter that he stressed the reflexivity of the Academic doctrine of ἀκαταληψία. In Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (*Against the Academics*), which is unlikely to have been influenced by Pyrrhonian sources and is instead clearly indebted to Cicero's *Academic Books*,¹¹⁴ we find something strikingly reminiscent of Sextus' ladder simile:

1137 It is not difficult . . . to use another simile. For example, nobody crosses the Aegean Sea without a ship or whatever other means of transport, or, not to fear the example of Daedalus himself, even without any equipment suitable for this, or some more secret power. If he proposes to do nothing else than get to the other side, then once he has made the crossing he is ready to throw

Luc. 29 and 109 (1123 and 1124), appears to me ungrounded given the only vague resemblance of these passages.

¹⁰⁹ This would be even more true if one accepted certain interpretations which make Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonism radically different from Sextus' (cf. p. 329n66).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Phot. *Bibl.* 212, 169b30–5. For some cautionary notes on the standard account of Aenesidemus' defection from the Academy cf. Decleva Caizzi 1992.

¹¹¹ Cf. e.g. Sedley 1983b: 12. ¹¹² Cf. e.g. Warren 2000: 150.

¹¹³ Cf. e.g. Ferrari 1968: 207: 'analogia con i purganti ha la sua più verosimile origine in un ambiente medico completamente estraneo a Timone ma ragionevolmente identificabile con quella larga corrente di medicina empirica che s'impadronì in notevole misura dello scetticismo'; Chiesara (2001: 131).

¹¹⁴ On Augustine's philosophical readings and sources cf. Courcelle 1969: 149–96.

away (*abjicere*) and condemn whatever carried him there. In the same way, it seems to me that for anyone who wants to reach the harbour of wisdom (as though it were a most secure and tranquil place) . . . it is necessary to have fortune to get what he desired.¹¹⁵ (Aug. *Acad.* 3.2.3)

Although of course independent genesis cannot be ruled out,¹¹⁶ this is a possible interesting clue that at least some of the Pyrrhonian similes might have had a previous Academic life.¹¹⁷ But, again, the fact that certain similes were most probably available to Aenesidemus and his immediate successors does not guarantee that the whole theoretical framework and argumentative strategy within which Sextus puts them to use would have been equally available to early Pyrrhonists.

It is in light of these considerations that we should try to assess the force of this battery of anti-Pyrrhonian charges by Aristocles:

¹¹⁵ Nihil magnum est . . . alio simili uti. Nam ut sine navi, vel quodlibet vehiculo, aut omnino, ne vel ipsum Daedalum timeam, sine ullis ad hanc rem accomodatis instrumentis, aut aliqua occultiore potentia, Aegeum mare nemo transmittit; quamvis nihil aliud, quam pervenire proponat, quod cui ei evenerit, illa omnia quibus advectus est, paratus sit abjicere atque contemnere: ita quisquis ad sapientiae portum, et quasi firmissimum et quietissimum solum pervenire voluerit . . . necessariam mihi videtur ad id, quod concupivit, habere fortunam.

¹¹⁶ Consider, for example, how similar Augustine's simile is to Buddha's raft simile in the *Alagaddupama Sutta* (*The Discourse on the Snake Simile*):

Suppose, monks, there is a man journeying on a road and he sees a vast expanse of water of which this shore is perilous and fearful, while the other shore is safe and free from danger. But there is no boat for crossing nor is there a bridge for going over from this side to the other . . . Now that man collects reeds, sticks, branches and foliage, and binds them into a raft. Carried by that raft, labouring with hands and feet, he safely crosses over to the other shore. Having crossed and arrived at the other shore, he thinks: 'This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, labouring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not lift this raft on my head or put it on my shoulders, and go where I like?' What do you think about it, o monks? Will this man, by acting thus, do what should be done with a raft? – 'No, Lord' – How then, monks, would he be doing what ought to be done with a raft? Here, monks, having got across and arrived at the other shore, the man thinks: 'This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, and labouring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not pull it up now to the dry land or let it float in the water, and then go as I please?' By acting thus, monks, would that man do what should be done with a raft. In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to. (*Majjhima Nikaya* 22.13; translation Nyanaponika 1974)

For exploration of the possible historical and philosophical connection between ancient Pyrrhonism and Buddhism cf. McEvilley 1982, Kuzminski 2008.

¹¹⁷ The comparison between the elenctic λόγος, which cleanses and frees the mind of the inflated beliefs which interfere with learning, and a purgative drug was introduced by Plato at *Sph.* 230b–d, and although the point that purgatives also eliminate themselves was not explicit there, it is easy to conjecture that this passage could have been a source of inspiration for the sceptical version. Philo of Larissa developed the simile between the philosopher and a doctor in great detail (cf. Stob. *Flor.* 2.7.2).

Τ138 Moreover, (1) if all things are 'equally undifferentiated' and for this reason one should have no belief, not even these things will differ, I mean differing or not differing, and believing or not believing. For why are they such-and-such more than not? Or, as Timon says, 'why yes, and why no, and why the very why itself?' It is clear then that inquiring is eliminated (ἀναιρείται), so let them stop making troubles. Since now at any rate they [*sc.* the Pyrrhonists] are crazy, without any method, and (2) while urging us to have no belief, at the same time they command us to do this very thing, and (3) at the same time in which they say that one ought to make no assertion they thereby make an assertion; and (4) they require to give assent to no one, but they command to believe them; furthermore, (5) although they say they know nothing, they refute everyone, as if they knew well.¹¹⁸ (Eus. *PE* 14.18.7)

Let us first attempt to understand what exactly the 'Pyrrhonian madness' scorned by Aristocles is supposed to consist in from a logical point of view:

- (1) Pyrrho's own famous claim that things are 'equally undifferentiated' (ἐπ' ἴσης ἀδιάφορα), previously reported by Aristocles (14.18.2), applies to itself and to its own terms. If there is no difference among things, and thereby we should have no belief, why should we say anything at all rather than its opposite? Why should we say that things are undifferentiated, with Pyrrho, rather than that they are differentiated, if in fact there is no difference between the two claims?¹¹⁹ For any *x* and any *F*, why should we inquire whether *x* is *F* or is not *F*, when being *F* and not being *F* do not differ? The truth of Pyrrho's own answer to the question 'How are things by nature?' would make asserting it, or anything else, and inquiring about it, or anything else, pointless.
- (2) By urging people to have no belief, the Pyrrhonists are at the same time urging them to form at least one belief, presumably the one that no belief should be had: the aim of their advice or command would thus conflict with its content, or, to borrow the familiar jargon of speech-act theories, the illocutionary force and intended perlocutionary effect of their utterance with its locutionary aspect.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ ἔτι γε μὴν ἐπ' ἴσης ἔστιν ἀδιάφορα πάντα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο χρή μὴδὲν δοξάζειν, οὐκ ἂν οὐδὲ ταῦτα διαφέρει· λέγω δὲ τὸ διαφέρειν ἢ μὴ διαφέρειν καὶ τὸ δοξάζειν ἢ μὴ δοξάζειν. τί γὰρ μάλλον τοιαῦτά ἐστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν; ἢ ὡς φησι Τίμων, διὰ τί ναι καὶ διὰ τί οὐ, καὶ διὰ τί αὐτὸ τὸ διὰ τί; φανερόν οὖν ὡς ἀναιρείται τὸ ζητεῖν· ὥστε παυσάσθωσαν ἐνοχλοῦντες. ἔπειτα νῦν γε μεμνήνασι πόρρω τέχνης ἅμα μὲν ἡμῖν διακελευόμενοι μὴ δοξάζειν, ἅμα δὲ κελεύοντες αὐτὸ τοῦτο ποιεῖν καὶ λέγοντες ὡς περὶ οὐδενὸς ἀποφαίνεσθαι δεοί, κἀπειτα ἀποφαινόμενοι καὶ ἀξιούσι μὲν μηδενὶ συγκατατίθεσθαι, πείθεσθαι δ' αὐτοῖς κελεύουσιν· εἴτα λέγοντες μὴδὲν εἰδέναι πάντας ἐλέγχουσιν ὡς εὖ εἰδότες.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Plato's refutation of extreme flux in the *Theaetetus* (part II, chapter 13, section 2).

¹²⁰ Cf. the second half of this twofold self-refutation charge discussed by Seneca (*Mor.* 95.60): 'Moreover, (1) those who eliminate doctrines do not understand that these are proved by the very

- (3) Whereas assertions like 'I'm not asserting anything' or 'No assertion is possible' are pragmatically self-refuting in the strictest sense (cf. part II, chapter 10), it is not clear how we should classify 'No assertion ought to be made': Aristocles' own point seems to be that by asserting it one is straightforwardly violating the very piece of advice one is thereby issuing.¹²¹ The propositional content of that speech act is not proved to be false by self-refutation, just as it was not in (2) (independently of what the Pyrrhonist does, it might remain true that one ought not to make any assertion), but it clashes with its illocutionary force.
- (5) Let us skip for a moment Aristocles' fourth charge. The following and final one (Τ138(5)) seems to be best classified as a charge not of self-refutation, but of pragmatic inconsistency, between what the Pyrrhonists explicitly say ('We know nothing') and what, according to Aristocles, they must be (incoherently) presupposing ('as if they knew well') given what they do quite generally (refuting or trying to refute their adversaries).¹²²
- (4) We can now come back to the fourth charge (Τ138(4)); it is quite underdetermined whether it should be interpreted along the same lines as (5) or as (2). In the former case, Aristocles would be levelling a charge of inconsistency between the Pyrrhonists' request that we withhold our assent from everything, on the one hand, and the Pyrrhonists' request that we believe them, i.e., presumably, that we assent to all

arguments through which they are eliminated. For what are they saying? That precepts are sufficient to develop life, and that the doctrines of wisdom are superfluous. And yet this very thing they say is a doctrine, (2) just as if I should now say that we must dispense with precepts on the ground that they are superfluous, and we must use doctrines, and that our studies should be directed only towards these; thus, by this statement with which I deny that we should take care of precepts, I would utter a precept' (*Praeterea non intellegunt hi qui decreta tollunt eo ipso confirmari illa quo tolluntur. Quid enim dicunt? Praeceptis vitam satis explicari, supervacua esse decreta sapientiae. Atqui hoc ipsum quod dicunt decretum est tam mehercules quam si nunc ego dicerem recedendum a praeceptis velut supervacuis, utendum esse decretis, in haec sola studium conferendum; hoc ipso quo negarem curanda esse praecepta praeciperem*).

¹²¹ Cf. similarly my analysis of Pl. *Sph.* 238d5–239b4 (T86 on p. 239).

¹²² Cf. Socrates' analogous charge against Dionysodorus at *Euthd.* 286e2–3 (pp. 33–4). Cf. also the following Aristoclean passage (*PE* 14.18.9): 'but if he [*sc.* the Pyrrhonist] should say that the same thing [not only is but] also is not, first the same thing will be both true and false, and second he will say and not say something, and by using argument he will destroy argument; moreover, while admitting that he speaks falsely, he will say that we must believe him' (εἰ δὲ φαίη ταὐτὸ καὶ μὴ εἶναι, πρῶτον μὲν ἔσται ταὐτὸ καὶ ἀληθὲς καὶ ψεῦδος, ἔπειτα δ' ἔρεῖ τι καὶ οὐκ ἔρεῖ καὶ λόγῳ χρώμενος ἀναιρήσει λόγον, ἔτι δὲ ὁμολογῶν ψεύδεσθαι πιστεύειν ἑαυτῷ φήσει δεῖν). In the first part of the passage Aristocles marshals some of Aristotle's arguments against Antiphrasis (cf. especially T14 on p. 69 and the final sentence of T22 on p. 87) and applies them, with a blatant *ignoratio elenchi*, to the Pyrrhonist. At the end, instead, he levels an *ad hominem* charge: the content of what the Pyrrhonist says implies that what he says is false, but by asserting it the Pyrrhonist is clearly trying to persuade us to believe him and accept that false content as true.

their arguments and pieces of advice,¹²³ on the other. In the latter, by their very request to withhold our assent the Pyrrhonists would be at the same time asking us to concede our assent to something, i.e. this very request: the locutionary content of their request would be incompatible with its illocutionary force and intended perlocutionary effect.¹²⁴

¹²³ Cf. *PE* 14.18.20, where the Pyrrhonian advice to 'live in accordance with nature and customs' is denounced as incompatible with the request to assent to nothing.

¹²⁴ *TI*38 contains some of the rare examples in the extant ancient philosophical literature in which the self-refuting speech act is an exhortation or command, rather than an assertion. We find analogous examples at *Disc.* 2.20.4–8, where Epictetus illustrates his general contention that what is evident must be 'used' even by those who contradict it (cf. n. 70 on pp. 115–16 for the immediately preceding text at 2.20.1–3):

πάλιν ἂν τις παρελθὼν λέγῃ γίγνωσκε, ὅτι οὐδὲν ἐστὶ γνωστόν, ἀλλὰ πάντα ἀτέκμαρτα ἢ ἄλλος ὅτι πίστευσόν μοι καὶ ὠφεληθήσῃ· οὐδὲν δεῖ ἀνθρώπῳ πιστεῦναι ἢ πάλιν ἄλλος μάθε παρ' ἐμοῦ, ἀνθρώπε, ὅτι οὐδὲν ἐνδέχεται μαθεῖν· ἐγὼ σοι λέγω τοῦτο καὶ διδάξω σε, ἐὰν θέλῃς· τί νῦν τούτων διαφέρουσιν οὗτοι (τίνες ποτέ); οἱ Ἀκαδημαϊκοὺς αὐτοὺς λέγοντες; ὦ ἄνθρωποι, συγκατάθεσθε ὅτι οὐδεὶς συγκατατίθεται· πιστεύσατε ἡμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς πιστεύει οὐδενί. οὕτως καὶ Ἐπίκουρος, ὅταν ἀναιρεῖν θέλῃ τὴν φυσικὴν κοινωνίαν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς ἀλλήλους, αὐτῷ τῷ ἀναιρουμένῳ συγχρῆται. τί γὰρ λέγει; μὴ ἐξαπατάσθω, ἀνθρώποι, μηδὲ παράγεσθε μηδὲ διαπίπτετε· οὐκ ἐστὶ φυσικὴ κοινωνία τοῖς λογικοῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους· πιστεύσατέ μοι. οἱ δὲ ἕτερα λέγοντες ἐξαπατῶσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ παραλογίζονται. τί οὖν σοι μέλει; ἄφες ἡμᾶς ἐξαπατηθῆναι.

Again, (1) if someone comes forward and says 'Know that nothing is knowable, but that everything is uncertain'; or (2) if someone else <says> 'Believe me, and it will be to your advantage: one ought not to believe a man at all'; or (3) again someone else <says> 'Learn from me, man, that it is impossible to learn anything; I tell you this and I will teach you this, if you wish'; is there any difference between these persons and – whom shall I say? – those who call themselves 'Academics'? (4) 'People, give your assent to this, that nobody assents'; (5) 'believe us, nobody believes anybody'; (6) So also Epicurus, when he wishes to eliminate the natural fellowship of human beings with one another, makes use of this very thing which he is eliminating. For what does he say? 'Be not deceived, people, nor led astray, and do not make mistakes; there is no natural fellowship with one another among rational beings; believe me. Those who speak differently deceive you and use fallacious reasoning.' Why do you care then? Let us be deceived.

Epictetus is not interested in the logical analysis of the precise flaws or infelicities of the speech acts he lists, but in the polemical force of his rhetorical tirade. Let us then try to diagnose those flaws ourselves.

(1) and (3) share the same structure: someone issues an order, or makes an exhortation, to know or learn that it is impossible to know or learn anything. But in what sense is such a person thereby using the very things he is trying to deny, i.e. 'Something can be known' and 'Something can be learnt'? Epictetus seems to be using the verb 'to use' (συγχρῆσθαι) loosely: someone who says 'Learn from me that it is impossible to learn anything' must be *presupposing* with his exhortation the very thing he is denying, the possibility of learning (otherwise his speech act would be infelicitous: in normal circumstances, you cannot exhort someone to do something you believe to be impossible).

Whereas it is logically impossible, by absolute self-refutation, to know that nothing can be known or to learn that nothing can be learnt (cf. part 1, chapter 2), one can believe one's interlocutor who says (2) 'Believe me, one ought not to believe a man at all', without realising that to hold such a belief is incoherent. Someone who says 'Believe me, one ought not to believe a man at all' is asking his audience at the same time to believe him (explicitly) and not to believe him (implicitly, in virtue of the propositional content of his claim), i.e. is advancing two conflicting requests (cf.

I suggest that, once again, a Sextan-style Pyrrhonist would not be silenced by Aristocles' multifaceted challenge:

- (1) Whatever Pyrrho himself might have meant when he proclaimed that things are 'equally undifferentiated',¹²⁵ a later Pyrrhonist need not have particular qualms about using the same formula, provided he intends it in the typically Pyrrhonian deflationary sense that, up to now, he has been unable to establish any objective difference between the various unclear matters of fact he has investigated, because they all have appeared to him undifferentiated. That formula, like all the sceptical φωναί, should not be interpreted as a negative dogmatic tenet (either metaphysical or epistemological) concerning the intrinsic nature of reality or the cognitive weakness of human beings, but as a first-person 'announcement' of the Pyrrhonist's present attitude towards the objects of dogmatic inquiry;¹²⁶ for this reason, 'All things are equally undifferentiated' does not apply to itself. Nor does it commit the Pyrrhonist to abandoning his sceptical inquiry (σκέψις), *pace* Aristocles: suspending judgement on the objective differentiation of things does not prevent the Pyrrhonist from distinguishing and using competently the meanings of words. Compare Sextus' own solution to an anti-sceptical version of Meno's paradox of inquiry at *PH* 2.1–10: the fact that the

*TI*38(2)) and presupposing what he is denying (the opportunity of having at least one belief) in the process of denying it.

(4) and (5) are explicitly attributed to the Academics, but their formulation is very suspect: what one would expect from an Academic sceptic (cf. chapter 15, section 1) are the different *normative* theses that 'Nobody is justified in assenting to anything' (or 'Nobody ought to assent to anything') and that 'Nobody is justified in believing anybody' (or 'Nobody ought to believe anybody'). Interpreted in this way, (4) and (5) become similar to (2), and the same analysis can be applied.

(6) is quite puzzling too: Epicurus, by advising people that natural human fellowship does not exist, is showing that human fellowship does exist, since only its existence can explain why he cares to warn his fellow-men. Suggesting that Epicurus is using that very fellowship he is trying to deny is a peculiar idiom on Epictetus' part: Epicurus is displaying it, i.e. is showing by his behaviour that human κοινωνία does exist. The *motivation* behind Epicurus' warning (his wish to rescue people from deception) is incompatible with the content of it; if this motivation is not only the one Epicurus himself would give, if asked, to rationalise his behaviour, but also the only one that could ever justify that behaviour, then argument (6) resembles partially an operational self-refutation charge: it is impossible to *warn* coherently someone else that human fellowship does not exist, although one can coherently *assert* this.

For a similar argument cf. Plut. *Stoic. Rep.* 1039D6–E4.

¹²⁵ For Sextus' caution in adopting the label 'Pyrrhonist' for his own brand of scepticism cf. *PH* 1.7.

I cannot discuss here what the historical Pyrrho might have meant by his claim that 'things' (πράγματα) are ἐπ' ἴσης ἀδιάφορα καὶ ἀστάθμητα καὶ ἀνεπίκριτα, and by what follows in Aristocles' crucial report of Pyrrho's position at *PE* 14.18.2–4 (on which cf. at least Decleva Caizzi 1981: 218–34, Stopper 1983: 268–75, Brunschwig 1994a, Bett 2000: 14–62, Warren 2000, Chiesara 2001: 86–109, Svavarsson 2004).

¹²⁶ Although πάντα ἐπ' ἴσης ἐστὶν ἀδιάφορα does not occur in Sextus' list of sceptical φωναί, cf. e.g. Sextus' own treatment of the expression 'Everything is undetermined' (πάντα ἐστὶν ἀόριστα) at *PH* 1.198–9.

Pyrrhonist denies having *apprehended* (καταλαμβάνειν) those things which the dogmatists claim to know does not mean or imply that he does not *understand* (καταλαμβάνειν) what the dogmatists say and thereby cannot inquire into it.¹²⁷

- (2) The Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgement is not a *decision* prompted by his commitment to the higher-order belief that all belief should be eschewed (*pace* T138(2)): it is the unavoidable psychological outcome of the perceived equipollence of the discordant reasons he constantly examines and of his incapacity for preferring any of them. If there is something the Pyrrhonist urges his dogmatic interlocutor (whether philosopher or layman) to do, this is not assenting to some general sceptical principle or slogan,¹²⁸ but carefully inspecting all the conflicting reasons and constantly performing the activity of sceptical inquiry on any unclear subject¹²⁹ (cf. point (4) below).
- (3) The Pyrrhonist does not assert that no assertion should be made, *pace* Aristocles; he chronicles, in his carefully pursued language of *non-assertion*, his own suspensive mental attitude, and suggests reasons and arguments which might produce the same attitude in his dogmatic interlocutor, steering him away from making assertions.
- (5) To Aristocles' fifth charge, Sextus would reply that the Pyrrhonist is not committed to the soundness of the arguments he propounds or to the truth of their conclusions: if he presents an argument for not-*p*, thus challenging his dogmatic interlocutor's belief that *p*, this is not because he presumes he knows (or, in fact, believes) that *p* is false, that not-*p* is true, or that the argument concluding not-*p* is sound (cf. chapter 14, section 3.3). He is exercising his therapeutic mission to free his interlocutor's mind from beliefs and pretensions of knowledge (cf. chapter 14, section 3.7).
- (4) For the same reasons as explained above, Aristocles might be accused of misrepresenting the Pyrrhonist's stance when he protests in T138(4)

¹²⁷ Cf. also D.L. 9.77.

¹²⁸ Such a principle would be something like the dogmatic *misinterpretations* of the sceptical φωναί discussed in chapter 14, section 2.

¹²⁹ At PH 1.204 Sextus informs us that some Sceptics intend the expression παντί λόγῳ λόγον ἴσον ἀντικείμεναι as an exhortation (παραγγελλματικῶς) or order (ἀντί προσηκτικού) addressed to themselves, lest they give up sceptical inquiry and slip back into dogmatism: 'To every argument that establishes something dogmatically let us oppose an argument that investigates dogmatically, equal in respect of credibility and lack of credibility and conflicting with it' (παντί λόγῳ δογματικῶς τι κατασκευάζοντι λόγον δογματικῶς ζητοῦντα, ἴσον κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν, μαχόμενον αὐτῷ ἀντιτιθῶμεν). For the comparison between philosophical 'theorems' and medical precepts (παραγγέλματα) to safeguard the healthy condition of the body once it has been reached cf. Philo ap. Stob. Flor. 2.7.2, 32–6.

that the Pyrrhonist demands our assent, at least if this means assent to some unclear matter of fact. The Pyrrhonist presents the kind of material by investigating which he was led to ἐποχή and ἀταραξία; the only sense in which he might concede that he is asking to be trusted by us is that he invites us to try and walk the same path he has walked, to try and climb the same ladder he has climbed, and see what happens (cf. chapter 14, section 3.7). This is not a request to accept something dogmatically; this is more similar to the friendly advice of someone recommending 'Trust me, try that cake: I found it delicious' or 'Trust me, try that medicine: it solved all my digestion troubles', without presuming that necessarily his friend will like the cake in the same way or experience the same degree of relief as a result of the medicine. It is the invitation to *do* something (scepticism is an activity), and not to believe something or someone.

Of course I am not suggesting that the availability of such rejoinders settles our quarrel in favour of the Pyrrhonist, or that these argumentative moves do not themselves raise other, deeper questions concerning the overall consistency and desirability of a Pyrrhonian outlook; what I wish to stress here is that Aristocles' formulation of his charges in T138 simply ignores the possibility of such replies (just as it was the case for his T135). This might be imputable to Aristocles' polemic purposes, which could have led him to maliciously misrepresent and trivialise his adversaries' position, or to his ignorance of the fine details of that position. However, it is equally possible, again, that the crudeness of Aristocles' charges reflects some actual degree of naivety, or at least indeterminacy, in the sceptical position he was targeting: the sophisticated answers I have proposed on behalf of 'the Pyrrhonist' and on the basis of Sextan material could have been devised only later, in response to first-hour pressing objections like those voiced by Aristocles himself.

The same choice of options is also on the table when we reconsider the more specific question of why, in Aristocles' and Diogenes' accounts, the Pyrrhonist's self-elimination claim, illustrated through the purgatives simile, is not presented as a part of that complex dialectical strategy, the περιγραφή argument, which I have reconstructed on the basis of a close reading of Sextus Empiricus. One might conjecture that the περιγραφή argument – or something resembling it – did appear in Aristocles' and Diogenes' sources, but Diogenes' mainly biographic and doxographic interests and Aristocles' conciseness (amplified by his hostile attitude) made it unrecognisable. It is not difficult to imagine that Aristocles could have excerpted only the passage containing the puzzling simile of the purgatives,

thus depriving it of its actual role and effectiveness, and then submitted what remained to his reproach of silliness. In Diogenes, instead, both the Pyrrhonist's actual justification for his use of language (ΤΙ33) and the self-elimination claim and purgatives simile (ΤΙ31, ΤΙ32 and ΤΙ34) are preserved, but since they are presented independently an inconsistency arises. It is not wild speculation to hypothesise that Diogenes simply missed the crucial logical link.¹³⁰ As for the significant absence of the (συμ)περιγράφειν jargon itself, one might conjecture that the jargon did occur in Diogenes' sources, but Diogenes failed to appreciate its difference from περιτρέπειν, and substituted it with the latter more familiar term¹³¹ (the same explanation is open for Aristocles' ἐλέγχειν).

However, a more straightforward hypothesis deserves exploration: the fully fledged περιγραφή argument might not occur in Aristocles and Diogenes simply because it did not occur in their sources, but was devised in the lapse of time between these and Sextus, and possibly by Sextus himself.¹³² The last option would be particularly attractive for those who like to think that history does not operate by chance, and that Sextus, our fundamental extant source on Pyrrhonism, was not a dull copyist of the previous Pyrrhonian tradition, but was gifted with a certain degree of philosophical creativity. The περιγραφή argument could have been Sextus' own original contribution to the defence of Pyrrhonism from the dogmatic attacks; after all, the double-compound συμπεριγράφειν, which stands at the heart of the argument, is not attested before Sextus. This is not to suggest that Sextus was the solitary creator of all the ingredients of that argument. From a very early stage of their philosophical career the Pyrrhonists must have provided some vindication for their use of language and argument, against the charges that these were at odds with their proclaimed lack of beliefs and mistrust in dogmatic reason. It is clear from our evidence that (1) the emphasis on the reflexivity, and thus self-elimination, of their utterances and arguments was perceived very early as a canny reply to that charge.¹³³ But their reflection on the nature of language clearly led some Pyrrhonists to elaborate also the idea of (2) the

¹³⁰ After all, that link is not so transparent in Sextus either, if painstaking exegesis has been required in chapter 14 to notice its existence and appreciate its importance.

¹³¹ That would require a degree of initiative on Diogenes' part which most scholars would probably judge suspiciously unusual. For insightful discussion of the sources, nature and limits of Diogenes' doxography in his *Life of Pyrrho* cf. Barnes 1992.

¹³² Clearly the further possibility exists that, although it had already been devised, it did not appear in Aristocles' and Diogenes' sources simply because they were not state-of-the-art sources.

¹³³ Perhaps as early as Timon himself (cf. ΤΙ38 on p. 344: 'Or, as Timon says, "why yes, and why no, and why the very why itself?"').

non-assertoric character of their utterances, and to maintain that such a posture put them in a safe place against any possible charge of disguised dogmatism or self-refutation.

It is not necessary that from the beginning the Pyrrhonists specified the nature of that self-elimination (but, obviously, they had to be confident that it was not a dialectically disastrous reversal (περιτροπή), incompatible with suspension of judgement), nor does it seem likely that they expressed it at once through the verb (συμ)περιγράφειν.¹³⁴ It is possible that they ended up adopting (1) and (2) as two *distinct* defensive strategies, perhaps without realising (or being worried by the fact) that (1) requires (and tries to face) a presupposition inconsistent with (2), that is the purportedly dogmatic, truth-claiming nature of their own utterances.¹³⁵ It is typical of Pyrrhonism to stockpile arguments of different nature, provenance and degree of plausibility, to be administered to different interlocutors depending on the severity of their dogmatic disease (cf. *PH* 3.280–1): for this reason, (1) and (2) might have lived side by side for a long time in the Pyrrhonists' argumentative pharmacy, before they realised that the two strategies were inconsistent, or began to care about that. This could be reflected in Diogenes' pages, and provide an explanation for the inconsistency I have pointed out different from ascribing to Diogenes himself philosophical dullness and doxographic inaccuracy.¹³⁶ A believer in Sextus' talent might suggest that Sextus finally saw the danger latent in the mere juxtaposition of (1) and (2), and managed to arrange the two distinct moves in a brilliant unified argument, in which not only was inconsistency avoided, but the force of the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. Someone less enthusiastic might suggest that Sextus found the argument already articulated in his sources, and his contribution consisted only in picturing the self-elimination of the sceptical utterances and arguments as a form of self-bracketing, that is in introducing the verb (συμ)περιγράφειν, as his own hallmark, in an argument inherited from more creative ancestors. Unfortunately, doubts could be raised also against a too easy attribution of this merit to Sextus; accepting Sextus' introduction of (συμ)περιγράφειν in the Pyrrhonian vocabulary only *ex silentio* is conjectural at best, since the silence could well be the result of the wreck which wiped out virtually the whole Pyrrhonian tradition, sparing only Sextus.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Cf. p. 268n55. ¹³⁵ Cf. p. 277.

¹³⁶ Diogenes' account could be a faithful report of an already inconsistent sceptical source, or could be the result of juxtaposition of different sceptical sources.

¹³⁷ Moreover, there is an occurrence of συμπεριγράφειν in Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 8.7.22.3), seemingly with the same meaning as in Sextus and in a sceptical context: 'since we can neither

On the shaky foundation of our scanty evidence, the 'developmentalist' case I have tried to build is thus bound to remain something ἄδηλον, in the realm of dogmatic conjecture, but it is certainly no less credible than the opposite 'unitarian' one. With an appropriate touch of Pyrrhonian equilibrium, let us then suspend judgement on the issue and finally bring our whole investigation on ancient self-refutation to an end.

believe all appearances, because of their conflict, nor disbelieve all of them, because also the one saying that all the appearances are not credible, being itself one of all the appearances, is bracketed along with (συμπεριγράφεσθαι) all the others, nor believe some of them and not believe some others, because of their equipollence, we are led to suspension of judgement' (μήτε γὰρ πάσαις ταῖς φαντασίαις πιστεύειν δυνηθέντες διὰ τὴν μάχην, μήτε πάσαις ἀπιστεῖν διὰ τὸ καὶ τὴν λέγουσαν πάσας ἀπίστους ὑπάρχειν ἐξ ἀπασῶν οὐσαν συμπεριγράφεσθαι πάσαις, μήτε τισὶ μὲν πιστεύειν, τισὶ δὲ ἀπιστεῖν διὰ τὴν ἰσότητα, κατήχθημεν εἰς ἐποχήν). It is impossible to establish with certainty that Sextus is earlier than Clement: while we are quite certain of Clement's dates (the *Stromata* were written in the first years of the third century AD), Sextus' life and dates are as mysterious as the life of our περιγραφή argument (cf. p. 95n1). Moreover, even granting that Sextus is earlier than Clement, Clement might still be relying, directly or indirectly, on some different and earlier sceptical source, and thus Sextus would not have the paternity of the Pyrrhonian usage of συμπεριγράφειν. The only Pyrrhonists whose name is mentioned in Clement's *corpus* are Pyrrho and Timon, and we have no certain evidence about Clement's sceptical sources. Witt (1937: 41) argued that the general character of *Stromata* 8 is 'unmistakably Antiochean', but Clement might be following some intermediate Peripatetic source, like Aristocles (cf., however, p. 341n108). There is no extant Sextan passage of which *Stromata* 8.7 is either a verbatim quotation or a close paraphrase: if Clement was drawing on Sextus, either he was quoting/paraphrasing some passage from the five lost general books on Pyrrhonism which preceded *M* 7–11, or he was elaborating with some autonomy what he had learnt from his Sextan readings (including the use and meaning of συμπεριγράφειν).

Conclusion

Much of the energy of disciplinary philosophy has been and continues to be devoted to demonstrating – as the self-refutation charge itself proclaims – that the apparently dangerous demons are actually impotent, self-deceived fools. That, in fact, seems to be the point of the self-refutation charge: to show, so to speak, that the devil is an ass.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1996: 144)

I opened this book with some brief reflections on the difficulty of drawing a coherent and serviceable identikit of the notion of self-refutation on the basis of the wide variety of uses and understandings attested in the modern literature. I will not pretend that the landscape of ancient self-refutation which we have explored together has not exhibited a considerable amount of diversity, and that it does not offer similar resistance to sweeping generalisations. The difficulty is amplified by the fact that we have no ancient theoretical treatment of self-refutation to guide us: Galen wrote a treatise *On the Theses that Are Subject to Self-reversal*,¹ in one book, but the only part of it which has survived is, sadly, its title. None the less, a sketch, if not a portrayal, of the most striking family resemblances which have emerged from our inquiry can and must be attempted.

The theses which came under the fire of the self-refutation charge in antiquity display, despite their variety, a common trait: they express radically revisionist positions, diverging not only from what was, or at least would soon become, philosophical orthodoxy, but also, and more basically, from pre-philosophical, commonsense views. The denial of the Principle of Non-Contradiction, the denial of the existence of any truth or falsehood, global relativism, extreme Heracliteanism, strong monism, hard determinism, scepticism about the senses and/or reason have been prominent in our discussion; all of them seem to share the same kind of extremist and

¹ περὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῦς περιτρεπόντων λόγων (*Libr. Propr.* 19.44, 3–4).

iconoclastic attitude.² We have observed that at least from the early fourth century BC self-refutation arguments came to be adopted with a certain frequency as favoured weapons to defend and restore orthodoxy against such attacks. There is a clear rationale behind this specific tendency: it is precisely because the proponents of those views are radical extremists that any common ground for philosophical discussion with them is extremely narrow and slippery, since any ordinary refutation will need to rely on concepts, presuppositions and premisses which they will stubbornly refuse to grant. The gist of the self-refutation manoeuvre is to exploit, economically, what these adversaries have already conceded, or can more or less reasonably be taken to have committed themselves to, by the very act of submitting their theses to public scrutiny. The self-refutation argument retorts these explicit or implicit concessions against these adversaries, thus eluding the obstacles created by their uncooperative character, by reducing to the bare minimum (ideally, to nothing) the extra amount of collaboration requested from them. This procedure must not only have been perceived as useful in dealing with the strictures imposed by the nature of radical revisionism; it must also have appeared particularly effective from a rhetorical point of view in unmasking and emphasising the extent of its weakness. For what could be weaker than a position which already contains in itself all the germs of its own demise? We have found more than once our ancient sources stressing the point that by being caught red-handed in self-refutation one is not only defeated, but ridiculed: to succumb to the enemy and lose a well-fought battle can be honourable, but to succumb to one's own foolishness and lose face, sawing the branch on which one is sitting, is only laughable. Although undeniably there is something 'tragic' in this kind of self-inflicted, suicidal fate,³ I have emphasised that the comic elements of ironic sarcasm or abusive mockery definitely prevail in our sources: just think of the funny backwards upside-down tumble which, according to Lucretius, the sceptic who claims that nothing is known forces himself to perform (T119 on p. 314), or the ventriloquist voice that constantly contradicts what the late-learners are saying (cf. T82 on pp. 226–7)

² For the idea that this is a basic characteristic of all the targets of self-refutation arguments cf. also Herrnstein Smith 1996.

³ Herrnstein Smith has suggested that ancient *περιτροπή* is, in some way, 'the counterpart of *peripeteia*, the turn of fortune that Aristotle thought most conducive to the effects of tragedy: fear, pity, catharsis. The emotional effects . . . are complex: anxiety and satisfaction, as fear yields to pity and terror to relief; the pleasure of formal symmetry (revenge and justice coincide, the punishment both fits and mirrors the crime) . . . orthodoxy vindicated' (1996: 150). For example, 'the self-refuting skeptic recalls other self-deluded, self-destroying heroes and villains', like 'Oedipus unwittingly condemning himself in his sentence on the killer of Laius' (149). For a possible emergence of this tragic vein in ancient descriptions of self-refutation cf. e.g. pp. 76 and 235–6 and T122 on p. 320.

or the constant stress on how 'amazing' or 'clever' the self-refuting theses are (cf. e.g. T2 on pp. 32–3 and T9 on p. 51).

By casting my general account of the underlying rationale for recurring to the self-refutation charge in terms of certain proposals, concessions, commitments and defeats in philosophical debates I have already introduced what has emerged as the single most distinctive feature of ancient self-refutation: its intrinsically *dialectical nature*. I have had plenty of occasions to clarify, corroborate, extend and strengthen Burnyeat's original insight about ancient self-refutation arguments: what is charged with self-refutation is not, typically, abstract propositional items, *in vacuo*, but theses as concretely held by persons and as put forward in debate.⁴ The standard outcome of a self-refutation argument is the defeat of these theses and their proponents, a defeat which typically is not a direct consequence of the theses' propositional content, but is determined by the very fact that they have been put forward for discussion or by the way in which they have been put forward. For example, if you (allegedly) assert that 'Nothing is true', then by this very speech act you are committing yourself to at least one truth, the truth of what you are asserting (cf. e.g. T35 on p. 117). But assertion is not the only 'way' of presenting a thesis which can be retorted against one's opponent; we have learnt that the self-refuting 'ways' of advancing a certain thesis are many and varied. These include its simple linguistic formulation (for example, 'you cannot speak of what is not', says the Eleatic Stranger; 'fool, you are yourself speaking – or attempting to speak – of it right now, refuting yourself!': T86 on p. 239), the reasons and arguments proposed in its support or defence (e.g. the Pyrrhonist refutes himself when he advances a purported demonstration that no sound demonstration exists: T103 on pp. 278–9), and the attitudes, motivations and purposes underlying the proposal (e.g. it is self-refuting to blame your interlocutor because he is so stupid that he does not understand the truth of determinism: T46 on p. 148). One's defeat by self-refutation can consist either in admitting the contradictory of one's own original proposal (self-reversal) or in withdrawing it and conceding that there was no reason to accept it in the first instance, or no way to advance and defend it coherently (self-elimination). I have also argued, against extensive scholarly consensus, that in neither case do ancient self-refutation arguments prove, or aim to prove, the falsehood of the thesis which incurs defeat: that thesis cannot survive dialectical scrutiny, and in some cases does not ever bear articulating, but typically the self-refutation argument does not exclude the possibility that what is expressed

⁴ For clarification of the broad sense in which I have used 'debate' and 'dialectical context' cf. p. 27.

is the case. Is this limitation to be construed as a weakness of the argument? I have tried to suggest that the correct response is 'no'. Establishing that a certain position is – whatever the exact reason may be – untenable in debate and sometimes, more fundamentally, impossible to present coherently, is no minor philosophical achievement. As McCabe comments with reference to broad Protagorean relativism, extreme Heraclitean flux, and strong Parmenidean monism, Plato aimed at showing us that each of them

only seems to be a position which we can occupy. It cannot be occupied because it cannot be articulated within the public arena; and for this reason the person who attempts to occupy it fails to turn up. For a philosophical position that cannot be occupied *by a person* is no philosophical position at all; persons are necessary for philosophy. (2000: 138)

In light of the results of our inquiry, an analogous diagnosis can be extended to the ancient self-refutation argument quite generally: its function is that of unmasking the impossibility of successfully articulating and defending one's position in the public arena because of the very nature of that position.

Our investigation has revealed that we should resist the easy temptation, common in the scholarly literature, of interpreting ancient self-refutation arguments as instances of that peculiar form of *reductio ad contradictionem*, the *Consequentia Mirabilis*, in which a certain proposition *p* is assumed, shown to entail its contradictory not-*p*, and thus discharged as false to conclude the necessary truth of not-*p*. I have demonstrated that the crucial inference from 'if *p*, then not-*p*' to 'not-*p*' is, as a matter of fact, consistently missing from our texts, and I have argued that this is neither mere chance, nor a sign of the ancient logicians' scarce logical rigour: interesting 'non-classical' traits of the two most prominent ancient systems of logic, Aristotelian syllogistic and Chrysippean dialectic, could have made any formal argument in the pattern of a *Consequentia Mirabilis* unsound (cf. chapters 6 and 10). I have also argued that, actually, it is certain formalisations of ancient self-refutation arguments that, by stripping them of their dialectical garb and making of them alleged logical proofs of the necessary truth of certain propositions, are not only philologically inaccurate and historically anachronistic, but often also logically suspect.⁵ In chapters 2 and 10 I have also signalled the similar difficulties which the most influential modern formal analysis of self-refutation seems to incur.

The kind of 'modesty' I have attributed to ancient self-refutation does in fact deserve some praise. Any ambitious attempt to establish that radical

⁵ Cf. especially chapter 5 (sections 2 and 3), chapter 10, chapter 11, and pp. 115–6n70 and 196n39.

forms of relativism, determinism or scepticism must be false on the sole basis of the troubles which their supporters supposedly incur when trying to express and defend them should be assessed with caution: as Sorensen puts it, there seems to exist

a large class of positions which might be true but which cannot be held. Our vision of reality contains blindspots... Since the best we can count on is an indifferent universe, we are left with the conclusion that some truths may well have been placed out of reach by the rules of representation. (1988: 7)

I have no doubt that many teleologically minded ancient thinkers would have rejected the presupposition of Sorensen's final remark, and that some modern epistemologists and philosophers of language would protest that the very notion of 'blindspot' rests on an ill-conceived idea of what truth and knowledge are. None the less, Sorensen's contention is a healthy reminder that we ought not to *assume* unreflectively that self-refutation arguments *by themselves* have the power to magically fill our 'blindspots', establishing once for all the most fundamental, thought-independent truths about reality⁶ (nor can we project that assumption on to the ancients in the absence of any clear evidence for doing so). But even if they do not 'falsify' our most radical adversaries' views (and defuse our own most hyperbolic doubts) by proving that what they envisage is 'logically impossible', self-refutation arguments can bracket and silence them, by clarifying and delimiting the boundaries of coherent discourse and the grounds of constructive philosophical inquiry and debate.⁷ The self-refutation arguments themselves were not perceived by the ancients as philosophical wonders (*consequentiae mirabiles*!); it is the self-refuting positions that were described as amazing in their hopelessness. Here the archetypal opposition between

⁶ *Contra* Saccheri (1733: 99): 'For this seems to be the primary character of any fundamental truth: starting from its own negation assumed as true, through an exquisite form of refutation, it can at the end be returned to itself.' From a perspective very different from Sorensen's, the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* (1969) would have also denied that many of the self-refutation arguments we have examined in this book can establish the fundamental truths about reality: the kind of *certainties* beyond reasonable or meaningful doubt at which those arguments point are the foundations, neither true nor false, in which all our discourse about truth and falsehood and our quest for knowledge are rooted, and are not themselves true objects of knowledge.

⁷ Cf. Haslanger 1992 for a nice formulation of this idea in the related context of the 'pragmatic paradoxes' (on which cf. p. 3n6). Mackie's (1964: 203) own conclusion concerning the philosophical prospects of the self-refutation argument seems exceedingly deflationary: since all interesting cases of self-refutation in philosophical debates amount to cases of operational self-refutation, 'the detection of them [*sc.* self-refutations] does not lead to any necessary truth', and thus the way in which self-refutation arguments have been used in the history of philosophy must be relinquished in favour of a more empiricist approach. For a curious, and in my opinion clearly unsuccessful, attempt to show that 'whenever a proposition can be shown to be not coherently asserted, it must be false' through a priori logical considerations cf. Page 1992.

the orthodox and the revisionist within the dialectic of self-refutation turns out to be crucial: even if silencing your adversary does not necessarily amount to proving the absolute truth of your own position, it can be all you need if your position is already the default one, and therefore you do not need to win new ground, but only to withstand the barbarous siege. If the burden of proof is on your adversary, and he is bound by what he says either to endorse, unwittingly, your position (reversal) or at least to give up his own (self-elimination or self-bracketing),⁸ then you can consider yourself, and your thesis, clear-cut winners.⁹

A manoeuvre like the self-refutation argument acquires extra value given the centrality of dialogue and dialectic for ancient philosophy and logic, at which I have hinted time and again in this book, without daring to fully awaken a beast which would require bulky volumes in its own right to be fed. Just consider here an obvious expression of that centrality, Plato's account of judgement and belief as the outcome of an inner silent dialogue with oneself:

T139 For it seems to me that when it thinks [the soul] is simply carrying on a discussion (διαλέγεσθαι) in which it asks questions to itself and answers to itself, and affirms and denies. And when, having come to something definite, either very slowly or by a sudden leap, it now affirms one and the same thing and is not in doubt, we affirm that this is its judgement. So I say that to judge is to make a statement, and that judgement is a statement, not however addressed to someone else or aloud, but silently to oneself.¹⁰ (*Th.* 189e7–190a6)

On such an influential account,¹¹ it is not only in the public arena that certain positions cannot be defended because they refute themselves; there is no alternative, private, non-dialectical space into which the solitary

⁸ In chapter 14 I showed that Sextus Empiricus adopts self-bracketing (but not reversal) as an anti-dogmatic strategy, by clarifying that the Pyrrhonist himself has no positive commitment to the self-bracketing position.

⁹ Cf. pp. 175–6 for some ancient evidence in support of this idea.

¹⁰ τοῦτο γάρ μοι ἰνδάλλεται διανοομένη οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ διαλέγεσθαι, αὐτὴ ἑαυτὴν ἐρωτῶσα καὶ ἀποκρινομένη, καὶ φάσκουσα καὶ οὐ φάσκουσα. ὅταν δὲ ὀρίσασα, εἴτε βραδύτερον εἴτε καὶ ὀξύτερον ἐπάρσασα, τὸ αὐτὸ ἥδη φῆ καὶ μὴ διστάζει, δόξαν ταύτην τίθεμεν αὐτῆς. ὥστ' ἐγώ γε τὸ δοξάζειν λέγειν καλῶ καὶ τὴν δόξαν λόγον εἰρημένον, οὐ μέντοι πρὸς ἄλλον οὐδὲ φωνῇ, ἀλλὰ σιγῇ πρὸς αὐτόν.

¹¹ Cf. also Pl. *Sph.* 263e–264b, *Phlb.* 38c–e; Arist. *Metaph.* Γ 4, 1006b8–10: 'If words do not signify, our discussing with one another is destroyed, and in truth *even with ourselves*; for it is impossible to *think* of anything without thinking of one thing' (μὴ σημαίνοντων δὲ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀνήρηται τὸ διαλέγεσθαι πρὸς ἀλλήλους, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ πρὸς αὐτόν· οὐθεν γὰρ ἐνδέχεται νοεῖν μὴ νοοῦντα ἐν). For discussion of T139 and its significance within Plato's choice of the dialogue form cf. Long 2008: 55–9.

revisionist thinker might retreat and stubbornly pretend to stick to his self-refuting hypothesis while remaining a thinker.

According to White, who expresses a quite common view in the scholarly literature,¹²

self-refuting propositions have three essential characteristics. They are false. They falsify or contribute to falsifying themselves. They falsify themselves through self-reference. (1989: 84)

I hope I have constructed a compelling case against the idea that falsification is the standard intended outcome of ancient self-refutation, or even only a frequent one. A thorny question is what level of consciousness we are entitled to attribute *to the ancients* themselves of anything like my clear-cut distinction between an 'absolute', logical proof of the falsehood of a certain proposition and a dialectical silencer of its supporters, particularly in light of the generalised dialectical approach to philosophy to which I have just referred. Although no such distinction is explicitly articulated in any of our sources, I have suggested that it might be reflected in the caution with which the conclusions of the self-refutation argument are often cast in terms of the admissions or concessions to which the proponents of certain theses are finally bound. However, we have also noticed an opposite tendency to elliptical formulations which blur that distinction: it is difficult to decide whether such a tendency reflects some confusion in our sources between the two distinct levels or testifies exactly to the opposite, i.e. to the fact that the dialectical setting for self-refutation was so obvious that making it explicit was often felt as unnecessary. The correct answer might lie, as often happens, somewhere in the middle, and should be carefully assessed case by case.

White's third essential condition for self-refutation, self-reference, also requires some comment. Although propositional self-reference, either direct (e.g. if everything is false, then 'Everything is false' must itself be false: cf. T34 on p. 114) or indirect (e.g. if the conclusion that the senses are unreliable depends on a reasoning which rests ultimately on the senses, then it must itself be unreliable: cf. T116 on p. 309), is an ingredient of some of the arguments which we have analysed, it is by no means a typical one. Usually the 'self' involved in ancient self-refutation turns out to be much less unitary and more complex than we might have expected:¹³ it is this internal complexity that makes the self-refutation charge possible, since some 'part' or 'aspect' of the structured unit (the advanced propositional

¹² Cf. p. 3n5. ¹³ Cf. e.g. pp. 174 and 235.

content) conflicts with some different 'part' or 'aspect' (the way in which this content is put forward, where this 'way' is to be construed broadly, as I have reiterated above). This generous extension of what counts as self-refuting makes it difficult, sometimes, to draw sharp boundaries between ancient charges of self-refutation and inconsistency, but it does not void our original distinction.¹⁴

So far I have praised the ancient approach to self-refutation for its 'modesty' and caution. This does not mean that all the ancient examples of self-refutation argument we have examined are equally effective and persuasive in fulfilling their proposed task. As we have seen, a supposed advantage of self-refutation arguments is that they exploit only what your opponent has *already* admitted, or is *already* committed to conceding, in virtue of his own position and his daring choice of engaging in dialectic with us as a rational human being among human beings. To agree on the precise extent of our 'rational and dialectical commitments', however, can be at times no less difficult and controversial than to agree on the truth-value of the premisses of an ordinary direct refutation. Certain theses targeted by the self-refutation charge do seem to be impossible to express in a coherent way (or even in an interestingly incoherent one), let alone to support and defend in debate;¹⁵ however, I have signalled more than one case in which our revisionist opponent might protest that the self-refutation argument is question-beggingly foisting upon him *our* tacit assumptions, to which not only has he never committed himself, explicitly or implicitly, but which he has actually rejected, at least by implication, in the very act of presenting his revisionist views.¹⁶ Consider for example this sceptical rejoinder: 'You say that if nothing is known, then I must admit that not even this can be known, so I refute myself and my position is not worth your attention; but it is *you* who are saddling me the silly idea that I know that knowledge is impossible, and are imposing upon me your absurdly high demand that something is worth discussing only if it has been accepted to be a possible object of knowledge.'¹⁷ Rejoinders of this kind are extremely rare in our ancient sources;¹⁸ but history is typically written by the winners, and at least some of the (alleged) self-refuting fools ridiculed in our texts had probably

¹⁴ Cf. pp. 6–8 in the introduction.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. the version of strong monism discussed in chapter 13, section 3.

¹⁶ For the idea that most self-refutation arguments are unacceptably question-begging cf. Herrnstein Smith 1996.

¹⁷ This rejoinder could be used to counter self-refutation arguments such as those in T119 (p. 314) and T122 (p. 320).

¹⁸ Sextus' reply to the *περιτροπή* charge against the 'proof against proof' which we have examined at length in chapter 14, section 3 is a notable exception.

more to say than their ancient orthodox critics (and some of their modern interpreters) have allowed them to say. We should not forget that, after all, the heirs of some of our ancient revisionists are still alive and kicking in the modern philosophical arena; the very survival and flourishing of twenty-first century dialetheists, relativists, determinists and sceptics might reveal something about the actual finality of the self-refutation charge.

The idea that all self-refutation arguments could or should avail themselves *exclusively* of what is indisputably contained in, or implied by, the self-refuting position is illusory. The success of a self-refutation argument will depend on the degree to which the further presuppositions involved are bound to be perceived by all the parties to the debate (including, crucially, the audience) as the immovable background conditions for any discussion on a certain subject to take place and remain an intelligible and genuine discussion on that subject, and, correspondingly, on the degree to which any rejection of these presuppositions will appear as a desperate *ad hoc* tactic to avoid conceding a clear philosophical rout.

Not only can ancient self-refutation arguments be no less controversial than some of their modern counterparts (or misinterpretations); I have argued that something unequivocally resembling our *Consequentia Mirabilis* finally makes its appearance (albeit only a tacit one) at the dusk of antiquity, in two different Augustinian contexts (cf. chapters 7 and 12), and that an interesting anticipation of self-refutation as a peculiar form of *reductio ad absurdum* occurs in the closing section of Sextus Empiricus' *Against the Logicians* (cf. chapter 14, section 3.7). This shift in the purpose and logic of the self-refutation argument, from defensive dialectical device to constructive logical proof (roughly speaking), was not accompanied by any theoretical reflection on Sextus' or Augustine's part; presumably it might testify to some parallel, broader change in the way in which philosophical inquiry and its method were conceived.¹⁹ I have no doubt that hunting down the history of this unsung turn through the middle ages to our days would be invaluable both for an increased appreciation of the distinctiveness, merits and limits of the ancient approach to self-refutation and for a better understanding and assessment of the self-refutation argument itself, its logic, force and prospects within current philosophical debates.

After all, if the history of a philosophical argument is complex and fascinating, so must the argument itself be.

¹⁹ Cf., however, the kind of inner dialogue staged by Augustine in his *Soliloquia* (chapter 7, section 1).

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